

jeervadhara

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Edited by
J. C. Manalel

PROCESSED

SEP 24 1996

GTULIBRARY

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Human Problem

Felix Wilfred

C. Thomas Abraham

The Word of God

George Soares Prabhu Mathew Variamattom

The Living Christ

Sebastian Painadath

Jose Panthackal

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

George Karakunnel

The Meeting of Religions

J. B. Chethimattam Thomas Manninezhath

The Fulness of Life

Thomas Srampickal

Mathew Paikada

Manager: **Jose Pollayil**

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

J.M. Pathrapankal

Mathew Vellanickal

Lucien Legrand

George Mangatt

George Koonthanam

K.V. Mathew, K. Luke

EDITOR - BOOKREVIEW

J.B. Chethimattm

jeervadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

The Historical Jesus

Edited by
J.C. Manalel

Jevadhara
Kottayam - 686 041
Kerala, India
Tel. (91) (481) 597430

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	85
Biblical Scholarship on Historical Jesus <i>L. Legrand</i>	87
Jesus of History and Jesus of Faith <i>Paddy Meagher</i>	107
Jesus the Christ of the Gospels <i>Augustine Mulloor</i>	119
The Historical Jesus in the Johannine Christological Vision <i>Mathew Vellanickal</i>	131
Jesus Today Steadfastness of Love and Life <i>Samuel Rayan</i>	146

Editorial

Jesus Christ is an ever-living reality to the Christian Church. This tradition has been alive since his life on earth down the centuries. The Gospels and Letters of the New Testament are the early Church's witness to this living tradition. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever". Even well-informed non-Christians have recognised this. S. Prasannarajan in his article entitled "Who's afraid of Rushdie?" in *Indian Express* of September 16, 1995 says, in contrast with "Khomeini's Islam and Thackeray's Hinduism", that "though Kazantzakis and Saramago have de-Biblicised Jesus, Christianity is still intact".

This is not, however, to deny the relevance and need and usefulness of scientific research into the historical Jesus. In a scientific age like ours, followers of all religions should welcome the findings of scientific studies and research even if they go against the popular or the prevailing images and beliefs of their respective religions.

Christians must love the Church, but truth more. Christian faith has to be reasonable - not that it should be proved by reason alone, but that it should be fully open to the demands of critical enquiry. As the faith of Christians is rooted in the Jesus of history they are to know what Jesus was like before his death, especially because they have to be his followers and disciples.

The knowledge of the historical Jesus should be interesting not only to Christians but also to the followers of other religions, as Jesus taught not so much a new religion as what a true religion should be with its central theme of God the Parent and the whole humankind as God's family. Even apart from such religious considerations every human should know how Jesus looked like and what he said before his death, considering the supreme position his towering personality holds in the world of history and culture.

Years of previous quests for the historical Jesus created considerable anxiety, in a lot including Christians otherwise learned, over the tension between the traditional Christian faith and the results of historical criticism of the Bible, because they had too much trust in the latter in seemingly scientific garb, very often failing to recognise its limitations which are amply revealed in the enormous diversity of

opinions among historical critics of the New Testament. Jesus Christ has been so fascinating as to elude them, is too mysterious to be categorised.

No Biblical scholar today will disagree with what Walter Kasper says: "The Gospels, even though they contain much detailed and authentic historical material, are not historical witnesses in the modern sense. They are rather testimonies of faith." According to Raymond E. Brown, Gospels are documents which in a sense develop backwards; their primary object is the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection.

The most recent Life-of-Jesus researches, becoming more and more inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural, have already yielded results, recovering substantive information about Jesus of history; old positions, such as the question of demythologization, unacceptability of miracles, apocalypticism of Jesus, history as against kerygma, are receding. It does not mean that it is going to be the end of it all.

No amount of scientific research, however, can generate Christian faith nor can historical criticism ever unravel the mystery of Jesus Christ. What it can do most is to corroborate the tradition of the Church. It will also help weed out exaggerated notions of faith and the Scriptures and avoid taking dogmatic attitudes as Vatican II has so admirably shown in its declarations.

In a world bereft of all human values and in a country all but lost in the mire of the vilest of crimes and corruption, the Life-of-Jesus research can hold aloft the torch of Jesus' truth and justice and love and be a constant reminder of his shining example of self-sacrifice and self-gift to humankind.

J. Constantine Manalel

Biblical Scholarship on Historical Jesus

L. Legrand, the well-known Bible specialist, presents a fine summary of what biblical scholarship has to say on the Historical Jesus. The intense scholarly research of more than two centuries is traced back from Reimarus to Wrede, from Albert Schweitzer to Bultmann and from neo Bultmannians to the present day. This quest for the Jesus of history, once pronounced dead by Schweitzer, has come back with a vengeance. Its present-day development into a multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural exercise is shown to yield positive results and some of the conclusions to be drawn from such researches are clearly specified.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the motif of the unearthed mysterious scroll has become common in popular fiction. Whether it be in the form of a novel or of a purported news item, the plot weaves the yarn of an old papyrus or parchment found in some cave, turning out to expose the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth, totally different from the traditional Christian understanding. Villains are provided by dubious agents sent by the Vatican or the World Council of Churches or both, lurking in the background and trying to do away with the damaging evidence and the honest Knights in shining armor of Truth. Sprinkle generous pinches of sex and gore, add a few corpses hanging under the bridges of London, Paris or Rome and you have the recipe for an alluring best seller that will bring in many more dollars than the patient and exhausting work of genuine scholars.

Now the only interest of such stories is that they exist, that they seem to meet with public interest and find a ready market. In its oblique way, this market testifies to an on-going fascination with the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also an ingenuous expression of a naive understanding of Christian faith which takes for granted that Christian claim stands or falls on the historicity of Jesus understood in the most materialistic way. On the Christian side, apologetics attempt to prove the superiority of Christianity over, say, Hinduism, by the fact that, with Jesus, "it really happened". On the opposite side, polemics try to show the vacuity of the Christian claim

by casting doubts on the historicity of the Gospels. A recent example of such polemics was that of Arun Shourie stating that "the claims of the Church have been undermined by biblical scholarship" discovering, for instance, divergences in the Gospels.¹ This form of polemics is as old as *The True Discourse* of Celsus, written way back in 178 AD and the response is also as old as Origen's *Contra Celsum* (248). Recently *Time* had a front page title and a long article entitled "Is the Bible Fact or Fiction?"² while *Newsweek* devoted full seven pages to a review of the scholarly study of R.E. Brown on *The Death of the Messiah* in 2 volumes and to the conclusions of the *Jesus Seminar*, a group of American academics investigating the historicity of the gospel material.³ In this context, it is worth looking more closely at what "biblical scholarship" has to say about the historical Jesus.

I. "The Quest for the Historical Jesus"

The first thing that biblical scholarship has to say about the "historical Jesus" is a *caveat*. Biblical scholarship has taken note of the necessarily subjective character of any knowledge, including historical knowledge. It is Voltaire, I think, who made the quip that, if God "made man at his own image and likeness", man has since largely given him back in kind. This is equally true of Jesus. Each generation has represented Christ in the image of its archetypal ideal. The old Byzantine mosaics project the impressive figure of the imperial *pantokrator*. Medieval monasticism, with the Carthusian Ludolf of Saxony (ca 1340) and the *Imitation of Christ*, down to Columba Marmion have made *Christ the Ideal of the Monk*.⁴ With the dawn of modern humanism in the 13th century, the Franciscan movement began to turn the attention of the faithful towards the human tenderness of the crib and the human tortures of the cross represented more and more realistically. Savonarola and the Protestant movement saw in Jesus the patron of their protest but Roman counter-Reformation inscribed, in gigantic letters round the cupola of St. Peter's basilica, the words of Mt 16:16 giving privileged value to the foundation of a hierarchical Church. Meanwhile, the Jesuit Hieronymus Xavier⁵, a grand-nephew of St. Francis Xavier, wrote for Akbar a life of Jesus adorned with all the fringes and the poetry of the East and it was also an Indianized Christ that Beschi presented in his Tamil epic, *Thembavani*.⁶

The process of a candid yet audacious interpretation of the image

of Jesus went on in a blissful unawareness until Lessing published in 1778 the curious notes of a rather obscure German professor of Oriental language called Reimarus (1694-1768) on *The aims of Jesus and of his disciples*⁷. According to him, Jesus was just a Jewish revolutionary who tried to launch a popular uprising, was arrested and executed by the Roman authorities. His disciples overcame this failure and rescued their enterprise by reconstituting his ministry and his death in terms of the messianic expectations and giving a spiritual interpretation to the death of the leader. Whatever may have been the value of this adventurous reconstruction, Reimarus occupies an important place in Gospel research in that he was the first to distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Albert Schweitzer was right in tracing back to him the beginnings of the "Quest for the Historical Jesus"⁸ that, from then on, tried to go beyond the report of the text to determine what could have been the real course of events.

This "Quest" is characterized by a methodology of suspicion. Refusing to trust the plain meaning of the text, it tries to reach the hidden thread underlying the surface plot. Whether the "true story" was thought to have been fraudulently hidden by deceitful disciples as Reimarus would have it, or whether it was unconsciously distorted by a *bona fide*, yet totally mistaken, mythological mentality as suggested by D. Strauss⁹, it was presumed that the Gospel account was not reliable and that the true story had to be reconstituted by scholarly ingenuity.

This was an application to biblical research of the Cartesian postulate of "methodological doubt", as a methodological principle. This is sound methodology indeed which has been the basis of modern science: no new knowledge can be acquired if there is no questioning and there is no reason why it should not be applied to biblical research as well. But the methodological principle was vitiated by the rationalist presupposition that wormed itself into the "Quest" and was as unscientific as the pietistic presuppositions of earlier ages. Jesus had to be reasonable: "common sense" and reason were the touchstone of any saying and action of his. This is where legitimate methodological doubt gave way to subjective and actually irrational suspicion. The "intention of Jesus" became a disguise for the "intentions" of modern rationalism.

The outcome was foreseeable. Computer like, the human mind

necessarily produces the data with which it is fed: feed rationalism in the "Quest" and it will necessarily turn out a rational Jesus.

Rationalism could take different hues according to its place of origin and assume a very irrational variety of forms. The French rationalism of Renan¹⁰ was imbued with all the sentimentality of XIXth c romanticism: it was Strauss dressed up in the iridescent colors of poetical garments. The Jesus of Renan was a Jesus *a la* Rousseau, Lamartine and Musset, a gentle Jesus, the "amiable carpenter" surrounded by a retinue of fair Galileans. Parallely and at the same time, Strauss was rewriting his life of Jesus "for the German people"¹¹ with the expressed hope that it would be "as thoroughly well adapted for Germans as Renan's is for Frenchmen"¹². His German Jesus was a sensible liberal teacher. Harnack would further expatiate the portrait of a master of ethics, preaching the fatherhood of God and the universal human brotherhood.¹³ But others proposed an equally Germanic but more forbidding Nietzschean Jesus, "sound to the core," in whom "there is no trace of an exaggerated sentimentality... nothing of ecstasy or vision."¹⁴ "As formerly in Renan the romantic spirit created the personality of Jesus in its own image, so at the present day the Germanic spirit is making a Jesus after its own likeness"¹⁵. The Indianized version of Jesus' life by Hieronymus Xavier was condemned as a "falsification"¹⁶ and a "contamination" of the Gospel. But its German and French counterparts were supposed to be authentic products of "rationalism". Strange conception of "reason"!

Diverse as those reconstitutions of Jesus' life might have been, they all converged on a picture made in the image and likeness of XIX c European cultures. It remained to discover that Jesus could be different, that he could be also the image of *God*, of the one who is totally "Other"¹⁷. A better knowledge of the Jewish and Hellenistic background of the New Testament brought the awareness that the world and the mentalities in which Jesus lived were very different from those of Western modern ages. The new direction was taken at the turn of the century by A. Schweitzer. He proposed his new understanding of Jesus' life in 1901¹⁸ and summarized it in the conclusion of his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*.¹⁹ In agreement with the spirit of his - and not of our - times, Jesus was a radical eschatologist. Considering himself as the Messiah, he announced the imminent end of the world. Jesus' purpose, for Schweitzer,

is to set in motion the eschatological development of history,

to let loose the final woes, the confusion and strife, from which shall issue the Parousia, and so to introduce the supra-mundane phase of the eschatological drama. That is His task, for which He has authority here below. That is why He says... "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34).²⁰

The multiplication of the loaves is an important moment of this eschatological campaign. Schweitzer considers the episode as historical "except the closing remark that they were all filled". The little portion that each received of the provision brought by the disciples becomes a messianic meal. By dividing the food, "he consecrated the people as partakers in the coming messianic feast"²¹. It is in that spirit that he sends the Twelve on their mission, thinking then "to let loose the final tribulation and so compel the coming of the kingdom. And the cataclysm had not occurred"²². In the light of this failure and of the prophecies of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, Jesus then perceived that the advent of the Kingdom must pass through his death. Had he stayed in Galilee, he would have had the multitudes flocking to him. Instead "he sets out for Jerusalem, solely in order to die there"²³, thinking that his death will force the hand of God and thus bring about the Kingdom. And so

at midday of the same day - it was the 14th Nisan, and in the evening the Paschal lamb would be eaten - Jesus cried aloud and expired. He had chosen to remain fully conscious to the last.²⁴

A tragic end of Jesus' career and expectations, and, by Schweitzer's own reckoning, a very negative conclusion to the Quest.

He will not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making... The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.²⁵

II. "Demythologizing"

But was not his apocalyptic Jesus too much of a "stranger"? Was this enigmatic image of a thorough eschatologist relevant for our times? What meaning could the modern age find in so odd a career and a mentality? Within a few years of the end of the "Quest" described by Schweitzer and brought to so strange a conclusion, two World Wars were to leave millions of dead and let loose such horrendous forms of cruelty and on such a massive scale as had never been heard of in human history. Could a world traumatized by the

concentration camps and the atom bomb find a message in the enigma proposed by Schweitzer?

Bultmann's solution is well known: "demythologizing". The world of the New Testament writers was a prescientific world following mythological thought patterns. Today's world is a rational world in which the myths of old have been replaced by scientific explanations and miracles have given way to technical achievements.

Man's knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world... We no longer believe in the three-storied universe which the creeds take for granted. The only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine... Now that the forces and the laws of nature have been discovered, we can no longer believe in *spirits, whether good or evil*... It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.²⁶

There follows a radical program of reformulation of the New Testament contents. "The Spirit... is the possibility of a new life which must be appropriated by a deliberate resolve"²⁷. "The doctrine of Christ's pre-existence and the legend of the Virgin birth... are clearly attempts to explain the meaning of the Person of Jesus for faith"²⁸. "Most of the wonder tales contained in the Gospel are legendary, at least they have legendary embellishments... There is no great value in investigating more closely how much in the Gospel miracle tales is historical."²⁹ For the Resurrection, the difficulty is not simply the "incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a dead person... Nor is it merely the impossibility of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses were cited... The real difficulty is that the resurrection itself is an article of faith... Moreover, such a miracle is not otherwise unknown to mythology"³⁰. Without formally denying the factual character of the resurrection, Bultmann considers that "*faith in the resurrection is really the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross*" and since the saving efficacy of the cross meets us in the word of preaching, "the faith of Easter is just this - faith in the word of preaching"³¹.

To this agenda Bultmann gave a triple basis, exegetical, philosophical and theological. The exegetical basis was the method of Form Criticism which he had outlined in *The History of the Synoptic*

*Tradition*³². The Gospel material, viewed from the angle of its literary forms and their various "concrete settings" is a valuable source of information on what the early Church thought of Jesus. But from there we have no way to bridge the gap to the historical Jesus himself. The faith of the early Church is the ultimate point our scientific exegetical knowledge can reach. Beyond that, the concrete setting of the life of Jesus himself is lost in the clouds of the unknown and unknowable.

The Philosophical basis was Heidegger's existentialism. Bultmann and Heidegger had been colleagues at Marburg University and Bultmann does not deny having been influenced by his companion. But he does deny having merely borrowed Heidegger's categories and forced them upon the New Testament. It is rather the opposite: "Heidegger's existentialist analysis of the ontological structure of being would seem to be no more than a secularized, philosophical version of the New Testament view of human life"³³.

As for the theological basis, it is the Lutheran emphasis on the proclamation of the word and the quasi-Barthian suspicion of human reason. Any rational justification of faith in Christ smacks of apologetics. If faith is to be faith, it should not be demonstrable. Any attempt at proving the historicity of the Gospels is denounced as a betrayal of the *sola fide* principle, as a recourse to human reliance, to the works of the flesh.

Thus can we see that the project of Bultmann is deeply theological. His is a work of faith, animated, one might say, by a missionary zeal to put the Gospel message across to the modern man in today's world. Bultmann's method gives its best results in his studies on the two New Testament authors whose purpose was actually to go beyond the mere report of the facts and actualize the Gospel message, Paul and John.³⁴

But as regards the historical Jesus, Bultmann's views opened a lively debate in which entered many dissenting voices. The weakest point of Bultmann's system may have been its fealty to Existentialism. Half a century after Bultmann's best known programmatic papers, we are less inclined to consider the Marburgian form of existentialism as the ultimate philosophy. Whatever may have been its value and influence, it was strongly conditioned by the *Zeitgeist* of post War II Western Europe. Neither those who have perceived the values of the Marxian global analysis nor those whose outlook has been shaped by the great philosophical traditions of Asia can identify their world

vision and their faith perception with those of Marburg.

On the contrary, the Lutheran emphasis on the potency of the word proclaimed remains an inspiring thrust of Bultmann's writings. Rightly also did he score the difference between faith and observable facts and the distinction between historic and historical facts. But the rigorous Barthian fideism with its mistrust of human values has now given way to a more wholistic approach to the human being and to more universal cosmic perspectives. Teilhard de Chardin, *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II and the various forms of Liberation Theology reflect wider concerns than those operative in Bultmann's presuppositions.

As regards his exegetical method, there is no doubt that modern exegesis is indebted to Bultmann for his masterly exposition of Form Criticism. But here also, too much rigidity has marred his conclusions - the unfordable gap which Bultmann sees between the early Church and the life of Christ is just a few years wide. It spans less than a generation, which is less than the interval found in the biographical reports of secular world history. Denying the possibility of a historical report on Jesus of Nazareth would amount to a denial of the possibility of any historical account at all, at any time and anywhere in the whole world. At the same time as Bultmann developed his views, other methods led other scholars to more positive assessments of the historical value of the Gospels. J. Jeremias attempted to identify the distinctive signs of the *ipsissima verba Jesu*.³⁵ His findings have not all met with universal acceptance. Yet, few would doubt that the *Abba* prayer is an echo of Jesus' own address to his Father.³⁶ And Jeremias' work on the Parables, following that of C.H. Dodd, has proposed a largely accepted "setting in the life of Jesus" for the parables.³⁷ The Scandinavian School provided also another angle on the transmission of the Gospel material by stressing the importance of the oral tradition, especially in the context of the rabbinical mnemotechnical teaching methods, similar to some extent to our Indian *Guru-sishya* pedagogical techniques.³⁸

To put it in a nutshell, the difficulty with Bultmann's method could be characterized as a cabbage problem. To clean a cabbage, the outside leaves are peeled away but an overzealous cook who would go on peeling the leaves would find himself ultimately left without any cabbage at all: there is no cabbage but in the leaves. Similarly the Bultmannian dilemma consists in not knowing where to stop peeling away the mythological layers of the text.³⁹ Historic and historical aspects cannot be dissociated. In an economy of Incarnation, the

historic pervades the historical. Form and contents belong together. The question is of whether even the cabbage is to be peeled away at all, whether the "mythical" element is a disposable superfluity. It is so for Bultmann who considers it a residue of by-gone ages. But modern anthropology and linguistics have shown the abiding value of "myth" in human thinking.

Myth and wisdom go together, as Aristotle had already seen when he affirmed, at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, that the lover of myth is a sort of philosopher, a lover of wisdom.. Myth is precisely the horizon over against which any hermeneutic is possible... The myth is transparent like the light, and the mythical story... is only the form, the garment in which the myth happens to be expressed, enwrapped, illumined.⁴⁰

Challenging and even enlightening as the views of Bultmann might have been, they called for further debate: the post-Bultmannian debate had to be opened.

III. "The New Quest"

And opened it was by Bultmann's own companions and students. The new discussion was initiated by a lecture given by Kasemann in 1953 at a meeting of the 'old Marburgers', i.e. of Bultmann's disciples, on "The Problem of the Historical Jesus"⁴¹. On several grounds, he said, the method of the master himself calls for a reassessment. Positing a glorified Lord of faith disconnected from the earthly Jesus ends in utmost "mythologizing" and the very fact that the early Church composed the Gospels shows that its faith in the historic Risen Lord was deeply rooted in its remembrance of the historical Jesus. Moreover we find in the Gospels a coherent faith interest in Jesus' behaviour, his association with the poor, the sinners (E. Fuchs) as well as in the authority he showed in his words and deeds (G. Bornkamm). Those historically perceptible elements of Jesus' life are part of his historic significance: Christian faith cannot be isolated from them. Bultmann had considered the "historical Jesus" as irrelevant to faith. His followers relinked faith and history.

Thus was launched a new wave of investigation of the historical Jesus. But the "New Quest" rested on a different basis. The former one was an attempt to reach "the real Jesus of Nazareth", as he was supposed actually to have been beyond the tradition of the Church. It failed because it pursued an "objectivity" that necessarily eludes human sciences.⁴² The Jesus it wanted to disclose was also supposed to be freed from any faith perception and this "scientific Jesus"

would have been regulative beyond and above any dogmatic - Pauline, to start with - formulation. The outcome, as we saw, was just a monastic or Protestant, French or German, liberal or revolutionary Jesus, if not an Essene or Buddhist one... The New Quest assumed the relativity of historical knowledge and, in the case of Jesus, the faith perception within which had emerged the Gospel witness.

Perhaps the problem may be summarized most simply by stating that it concerns the role of the subject in the historical process, in historical research, and in historical understanding. One dimension of history is clearly "how it actually happened"; but another dimension is what those happenings meant to those involved in them, what they meant to those who came afterwards, and what they mean, or may mean, today to those who consider them.⁴³

Form criticism showed that the *kerygma*, the faith proclamation of the early Church was the matrix in which the Gospel witness had developed. The historical quest therefore was no longer a matter of going beyond the *kerygma* but of reconciling *kerygma* and history, of elucidating the deep historical dimension of the *kerygma*. The new quest did not naively pretend like the old one to discover the "true Jesus". In its examination of the Gospel material, it

came to recognize the legitimacy in their procedure of transforming the *ipsissima verba* and the brute facts into kerygmatic meaning. Thus the modern approach to history and the self made it easy to emphasize the rarity of unaltered sayings and scenes.⁴⁴

In this new output of books on Jesus, authors attributed more or less latitude to this transformation of Jesus' words and deeds into faith relevance. The Bultmannian school tended to produce "minimal" lives of Jesus.⁴⁵ Others were more optimistic and wrote "maximal" lives.⁴⁶

Then for some twenty years, the case rested with the Bultmannian controversy having lost much of its fire, at least among the scholars.⁴⁷ In the meantime the attention of the biblical scholars had grown tired of the historico-critical method and turned towards other lines of approach, rhetorical, structuralist, or "narratologist". The "diachronic" study of the text gave way to the "synchronic" analysis. The hypotheses on the origin of the text were just "pre-texts". What mattered was the text itself, the matter at hand having only an archeological interest.

IV. And Now?

But now, in the last few years, the interest for the historical Jesus seems to have returned with a vengeance.⁴⁸ The reason for this revival of interest can be attributed to the pendular movement of scholarly - or simply of human - attention. It is due also to the apparition of new factors.

A first factor is the rediscovery of the Jewish roots and of the Israelite background of Jesus. This rediscovery itself resulted from the convergence of a variety of elements. An important ideological stimulus was the backlash of the Holocaust in Europe at the time of World War II. The massive scale and the cruelty of this atrocious genocide induced a sense of shame and led to a reflexion on the deep seated causes of antisemitism. Christian theology and biblical exegesis had its share of the blame in so far as it had dissociated Christian identity from its Jewish sources or even, too often, had expressed this identity in terms of antithesis of and opposition to Judaism. The Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of Vatican II on the Relations of the Church with non-Christian Religions has a long paragraph recalling "the spiritual bond that links the people of the New Testament with the descendance of Abraham" (S.4). Positive as it was, it was none the less criticized for listing the "Jewish Religions" among non-Christian "religions". A huge input of biblical scholarship tends now to see Christianity and Judaism within the continuum of a single religious movement.⁴⁹ Jesus did not "found" a new religion meanwhile proposing a radically new perception of belonging to Israel and, if the Church is a "new Israel", it is so in the sense not of substituting the old one but of proposing a renewed vision of the irreversible call of God.

At the same time, archeology brought new information on the times of Jesus and stirred the interested curiosity not only of scholars but of the public at large. The most spectacular discovery is that of the "Dead Sea Scrolls" found in 1947 in several caves of the Desert of Juda. The Scrolls turned out to be the remnant of the library of a Jewish monastic community, probably Essene, that lived near the Dead Sea shortly before and during the time of Jesus. The controversies that surround them and continue to reappear in the media are proof of the on-going interest of public opinion. Other discoveries have remained confined to scholarly circles but are no less important, like the finding in 1949 of a very old Targum lost in the shelves of the Vatican Library. Containing elements that may go back to the 2nd c AD, it gives precious indications on the way in which the Bible was read and interpreted in the early Christian times.⁵⁰ Less informative but more

spectacular was the discovery near Jerusalem, of the ankle bone, still pierced by a nail, of a certain Yehohanan who had been crucified some time before 70 AD.⁵¹ Other excavations, at Sephoris, for instance, a Galilean town just a few kilometres away from Jerusalem, have shown the kind of world in which Jesus the carpenter exercised his professional activity.⁵²

All these factors sharpened the awareness that the humanity of Jesus was not just a Chalcedonian dogma. It had the concrete features of a Galilean villager of the 1st century AD. The flesh assumed by the Word (Jn. 1:14) is not just an abstract metaphysical entity. It was a Palestinian flesh of the East Mediterranean world, a fact that cannot be overlooked under pain of docetism.⁵³ This new awareness produced a stream of publications on the Jewishness of Jesus. One of the earliest and possibly the best known is *Jesus the Jew* by G. Vermes.⁵⁴ He showed that several points of Jesus' teachings, commonly attributed to the early Church by Western academics, actually had a solid Jewish background. Another important Jewish contribution to the study of Jesus and of early Christianity was that of David Flusser, Professor of New Testament at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.⁵⁵ Obviously, this Jewish scholarship could not be expected to focus its interest on the intemporal Risen Lord: what they were interested in was the concrete image of Jesus as a representative of Israel's rich spiritual heritage. From another angle and making use of sociological models of analysis, G. Theissen tried to situate the life style of Jesus, his miracles and exorcisms in the context of the "wandering charismatics", a religious "type" which was not uncommon in first century Judaism.⁵⁶ It would be too long to go elaborately into the rich scholarly yield produced by the various forms of this new trend. One can refer for instance to the "Annotated Bibliography" appended by J.H. Charlesworth to the volume he edited on *Jesus' Jewishness*.⁵⁷ The way he summarizes these new developments is quite apt:

Far too many New Testament scholars still fail to scrutinize the presupposition that the historical Jesus is unknowable and lost for ever behind the creative editing of the evangelists. The dark side of Christology continues often unperceived; it is the contention that Jesus is solely and categorically the heavenly and preexistent Christ, the risen Lord, who is triumphant, transcendent and timeless. These docetic acids eat away the earthly dimensions, including the Jewish beliefs of Jesus and his earliest followers.⁵⁸

The revival of interest in the historical Jesus has come also from the

rather different horizon of Liberation Theology. Liberationist exegesis takes its stand within the shared struggles of the oppressed, addresses the community of the downtrodden and rediscovers in the pages of the Bible God's "preferential option for the poor". Its favorite *loci* are the story of the Exodus and, for the New Testament, the texts in which Jesus associated with the poor and the oppressed. The Passion and the Resurrection do play a great role in this liberationist theology but as Passion of the one who shared in the struggles and the fate of the oppressed and as his ultimate victory over the forces of servitude and death Liberationist exegesis sees the Passion as "the consequence of a practice of liberation"⁵⁹ and the Resurrection as an act of the God who makes enslaved people to "arise" in in-surrection.⁶⁰ For liberationist exegesis too, a Passion and Resurrection disconnected from their concrete incarnation in the life, message and praxis of the Galilean Carpenter would be mere docetism. In a recent document on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*⁶¹, the Biblical Commission credits liberation theology with "elements of undoubted value" such as the awareness of the presence of God who saves, of the communal dimension of faith, of the need for a liberating praxis rooted in justice and love. The Commission could have added the concern for the concrete historical Jesus of Nazareth to the list of the credits of Liberation Theology. The Commission may be right in warning liberationist exegesis against the risk of being "one-sided". But equally "one-sided" is the docetist idealism of Western scholarship consigning the incarnate and physical Jesus to the nebulous clouds of skepticism.

Other factors could be listed to account for the return to a new Quest. The research on the hypothetic but more and more widely accepted Q source to the non-Markan material of Mt-Lk and the discovery of Apocryphal Gospels⁶² have brought new dimensions to the argument of the "multiple testimony" of Jesus' sayings.⁶³ A promising development of archeological and socio-anthropological studies on the Galilean socio-cultural context⁶⁴ gives a clearer picture of Jesus' surroundings. Of course it would be naive to imagine that all this leads scholars to a benign consensus. Research calls for debate and scholars will not accept to be reined in at the service of apologetics. New discoveries give new light but open new debates. Without entering into the complexities of this new debates⁶⁵ we may just mention the two recent *Lives* of J.D. Crossan and J.P. Meier. Crossan carries on the tradition of the minimal lives of Jesus with overtones of

Reimarus.⁶⁶ Jesus would have been an illiterate Mediterranean peasant whose controversial wisdom could not but upset the authorities. He was summarily executed by the Romans and his body must have been thrown to the common pit there to be devoured by dogs. "Radical" as this reconstitution might look, it strikes the reader for the remarkable confidence with which the author proposes his reconstitution. Whether his archeology and sociological models are valid or not, we are certainly poles apart from Bultmann's diffidence as regards the Jesus of history.

Less adventurous and more scholarly cautious is the other "Life" by J.P. Meier⁶⁷. Meier cannot be classified among the "maximalist": he is not even too sure that Jesus' birth was really in Bethlehem and he speaks condescendingly of "the exegetical acrobats of an earlier generation... who desperately sought to harmonize the discordant testimony of the four gospels at any price"⁶⁸. But his scholarly information is faultless. He knows and takes into account the various opinions. He knows how far exegesis can go, the degree of evidence it brings and where it cannot go. Where the exegetical evidence runs short, he leaves the question open, when a conservative would say that, if it could happen, it did happen and a radical would exclude the possibility of its happening since the case has not been proved. He shows the same kind of exegetical common sense evident in the equally erudite works of his colleague R.E. Brown who, for instance, cannot sympathise with Crossan's unlikely hypothesis that the apocryphal Gospel of Peter would give a more reliable account of the Passion than the canonical Gospels and refuses to reconstitute the passion story on such a hazardous assumption.⁶⁹ Meier's conclusion gives the tone of his study:

What is beyond dispute is that Jesus of Nazareth is one of those perennial question marks in history with which humankind is never quite done. With a ministry of two or three years he attracted and infuriated his contemporaries, mesmerized and alienated the ancient world, unleashed a movement that has done the same ever since, and thus changed the course of history forever.⁷⁰

Conclusions

From Reimarus to Wrede, from Albert Schweitzer to Bultmann and from the neo-Bultmannians to the present day, we have retraced more than two centuries of intense scholarly research on the "Jesus of history". By way of conclusion, we may attempt to draw a balance

sheet of this long quest.

1. The enormous amount of scholarship calling upon such a variety of disciplines as papyrology, textual criticism, literary criticism, history, anthropology, comparative religion and comparative philosophy, sociology, archeology, etc. is by itself impressive. There is no other historical figure and no other book which has been as minutely analysed as Jesus of Nazareth and the four Gospels. Today's world remains as "mesmerized" by that figure as the ancient world.

2. Already at the turn of the century A. Schweitzer could pronounce the death of the old quest for a historical Jesus. It is dead because nobody would any longer show the somewhat naive optimism with which the XIX century authors successively proposed various reconstitutions of the "historical Jesus". The very multiplicity of those reconstitutions has been self-destructive. The "quest" is dead also because we have come now to realise that there is no superior objective "scientific viewpoint" from which one could stand on judgement over the Jesus phenomenon. The philosophy of history has taught us that history is always viewed from a certain angle; philosophical hermeneutics has disclosed the inherent presence of the subject in the study of the object; form criticism has shown that the proclamation of the kerygma has been the matrix in which the Gospels have developed and that no "objective" study of the Gospels can dissociate them from this faith witness. The judgement of the *Akademie* cannot claim to constitute a new infallible forum.

3. Dead also is the Bultmannian skepticism as regards the Jesus of history. The development of Jewish studies has given clearer contours to the profile of a Galilean peasant of the First century AD. The obscure idealistic implications of the shunning away from history begin to appear better and liberation theology would even be inclined to sense in this approach a latent Western maneuver to turn the masses away from the upsetting challenge of Jesus' message. Unconscious as it might have been, the spiritualizing interpretation of the Gospels was as biased and as pernicious as the suspected deviations of liberationist exegesis.

4. What remains very much alive in Bultmann's thought is his concern for a living hermeneutic for the modern world, his perception of the historical as encompassed by the historic, his stress on the kerygma and his awareness of the interplay between faith and history. Even if the solution he proposed was too one sided, his vision reached beyond the merely apologetic concern for historicity and he

took Gospel hermeneutics to the richer pastures that lay beyond apologetics.

5. In so far as India is concerned, these developments are also relevant. India knows very well the problem of the meaning of history, that is, of an eternal and abiding Truth immanent in the contingencies of a transient world. Can *sath*, the real Being, be enmeshed within the fleeting realities of this world? In concrete terms, can a carpenter living in a remote backward province of the Roman Empire in the distant first century of our Era be really "the Truth" as he claimed to be, for all times and all places? Attempts have been made to rescue the Christian claim by disconnecting the Galilean Jesus from the Risen Lord. Jesus of Nazareth, limited in space and time, confined to the narrow boundaries of Semitic culture and outlook, would be of restricted relevance for today's India. Only the Risen Lord in his Glory, Image of God and First-born of Creation would be the Christ of India, the Lord which the Sages and the Rishis of old would have already met in their vision of the Absolute. But would not this be a strangely Bultmannian solution? Liberationist perspectives, Dalit and Feminine Theology aptly remind us that the poor and their oppression are also very much part of the Indian landscape and that they cannot be dispossessed of the Jesus of Nazareth who shared in their toil and knew in the flesh what it means to live in a world of injustice and corruption. Indian hermeneutics has to face the complexity of the Indian situation, its culture and counter-cultures. No simple formula will solve the enigma of Jesus, which is the enigma of both the human condition and of the divine ineffability.

St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary
Bangalore - 560055

L. Legrand

Footnotes

1. Arun Shourie and his *Christian Critic*, Delhi: Voice of India, 1995, pp. 42-43.
2. Dec. 18, 1995, pp. 42-54
3. April 4, 1994, pp. 41-46.
4. Dom Columba Marmion, *Christ The Ideal of the Monk*, London: Sands, 1926, followed in 1952 by *Christ the Ideal of the Priest*.
5. Jeronimo Xavier (1549-1617), came to India in 1581, worked in Bassein, Cochin, Goa and was from 1595 to 1614 at the courts of Akbar and Jahangir.

6. Constantino Giuseppe Beschi (1680-1747) (*Veeramamunivar*) came to India in 1710 and became a classic writer in Tamil. His *Thembavani* ("The unfading Garland"), an epic of 3615 stanzas on the Life of St. Joseph, is recognized as a master piece of Tamil Literature.
7. Reimarus, Hermann Samuel (1694-1768), born and died in Hamburg. Though influenced by the spirit of the German *Aufklärung*, he remained a pious Lutheran and a regular communicant, basing his faith not on the Scriptures but on reason and the wonders of nature. He did not dare to publish his notes on Jesus in his life time. It was only after his death that Lessing published the "Wolfenbuttel Fragments" from the name of the place where the writings were preserved. The "Wolfenbuttel Anonymous" was not identified until 1813 when Reimarus' son, J.A.H. Reimarus donated the MSS of his father to the University and City Library of Hamburg. See *Reimarus: Fragments*, ed. by C.H. Talbert, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970.
8. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus. A critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, 3d ed., London: Adam & Charles Black, 1954 (1st English ed. 1910; German original 1906). Albert Schweitzer, born in 1875 began his career as a theologian, a philosopher (*Les Grands Penseurs de l'Inde*, Paris: Payot, 1936; Eng. Tr. *Indian Thought and its Development*, Wilco, 1960) and musicologist. He then studied medicine and in 1913 went to Gabon and opened a hospital and leprosy centre at Lambarene where he died in 1965.
9. Strauss, David Friedrich, (1808-1874) published *Das Leben Jesu* (Berlin, 1835) and *Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte* (Berlin, 1865). His *Life of Jesus critically examined* was translated in English in 1846).
10. Renan Ernest (1823-1892) published the *Vie de Jesus* in 1863 which met with rapid success, passing through eight editions in three months. It met also with violent opposition and became a *cause celebre* in Protestant as well as in Catholic circles: cf. A. Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-191. Schweitzer's exposition of Renan's work is a severe indictment of a work hiding its "lack of conscience" behind an "imperishable charm" (p. 191).
11. D.F. Strauss, *Die Leben Jesus fur das deutsche Vold bearbeitet*, Leipzig, 1864.
12. *ibid.* Preface.
13. Harnack Adolf (1851-1930). His main field of specialisation was Early Church History and the Lukan work. He summarized his understanding of Jesus' message in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, (Leipzig, 1900) (English tr. *What is Christianity*, London 1900) "the classical exposition of liberal Christianity" (J.S. Kselmann in *NJBC*, p. 1133).
14. Von Soden, quoted in A. Schweitzer, p. 307.
15. A. Schweitzer, p. 307.
16. The Persian text was translated into Latin by the Protestant Louis de Dieu under the title of *Historia Christi persice conscripta simulque multis modis contaminata* in 1639 as an illustration of the Catholic distortion of the Gospel. The term "falsification" is used by A. Schweitzer, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
17. According to the basic meaning of the main Hebrew qualification of God as *qadosh*, holy, totally different.
18. in *Das Messianats- und Leidensgeheimnis. Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu*, Gottingen, 1901 (English tr. *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, London: Black, 1914).
19. *op. cit.*, pp. 348-395 ; see also *The Mystery of the Kingdom*, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-273.
20. *The Quest*, p. 369.
21. *ibid.*, p. 374
22. p. 387

23. p. 389.
24. p. 395
25. p. 397
26. R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology", s.c.n H.W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth. A Theological Debate*, New York: Harper, 1961, pp. 4f. (italics are in the text). The original German edition appeared as a part of *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen*, BEvTh 7, Munchen: Lempp, 1941.
27. *art. cit.*, p. 22.
28. *art. cit.*, p. 35.
29. *Jesus and the Word*, London: Fontana Books, 1958, p. 124. To be fair to Bultmann, it must be added that he goes on to say: "But there can be no doubt that Jesus did the kind of deeds which were miracles to his mind and to the minds of his contemporaries, that is, deeds which were attributed to a supernatural, divine cause; indoubtedly he healed the sick and cast out demons" (*ibid.*)
30. *art. cit.*, p. 39f.
31. *art. cit.*, p. 41 (italics of the author)
32. Oxford: Blackwell, 1963 (original German edition. *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*, FRLANT 12, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921). See short summary in NJBC, p. 1138.
33. *art. cit.*, pp. 24f
34. See *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, KEKNT, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941 (Eng. tr. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 Vol. Tubingen: JCB Mohr, 1948, 1951 (Eng. tr. London: SCM Press 1952).
35. J. Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1965, pp. 9-30; "Characteristics of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*", in *The Prayers of Jesus*, SBTh 2d series 6, London: SCM Press, 1967.
36. Even the rather radical "Jesus' Seminar" gives a 83.33% rate of certitude to the Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer (J.R. Butts, "Probing the polling", in *Forum* 3, 1987, p. 116) and 80% to the same version of the first beatitude.
37. C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, London: Nisbet, 1935; J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, London: SCM Press, 1954.
38. Cf. H. Riesenfeld, "The Gospel Tradition and its Beginnings," in K. Aland and others (ed.), *Studia Evangelica. Papers Presented to the International Congress on "The Four Gospels in 1957" held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1957*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1959 pp. 43-65; B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, ASNU XXII, Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1961. Apparently unknown to the Scandinavian scholars, a parallel line of research had been already proposed in 1930 by M. Jousse (1886-1961): cf. G. Baron, *Marcel Jousse. Introduction a sa Vie et son Oeuvre*, Tournai: Casterman, 1965.
39. Actually Bultmann was criticized for having taken demythologizing only half way. To speak of the "saving event of the Cross" and even of a saving god is still mythological language. The destructive logic is thus pushed to the end with S.M. Ogden, *Christ without Myth*, New York: Harper and Row, 1961 and P. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, Penguin Books 1963.
40. R. Panikkar *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-cultural Studies*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, p.4. The collection of papers published in this volume is a valuable reflexion on the significance of "myth," taking into account the Asian context.
41. An English translation is given in E. Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SBTh 41, London: SCM Press, 1964, pp. 15-47. A convenient survey of this new stage of the Quest is given by J.M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, SBTh 25,

- London: SCM Press, 1959 and J.S. Kselman in NJBC, pp. 1141f.
42. "Nineteenth-century historiography and biography were modelled after the natural sciences.. Today it is widely recognized that this method placed a premium upon the admixture of nature in history and man, while largely bypassing the distinctively historical and human, where transcendence, if at all, is to be found" (J.M. Robinson, *The New Quest*, p. 67).
 43. H.K. McArthur, *In Search of the Historical Jesus*, London: SPCK, 1970 p. 14.
 44. J.M. Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 69
 45. G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960; H. Conzelmann, "Jesus Christus", in RGG III, pp. 621ff; E. Schweizer, *Jesus Christus in vielfältigen Seugnissen des Neuen Testaments*, München: Siebenstern Taschenburg, 1968.
 46. V. Taylor, *The Life and Ministry of Jesus*, London: Macmillan, 1954; C.H. Dodd, *The Founder of Christianity*, London: Collins, 1971. E. Stauffer's *Jesus: Gestalt und Geschichte*, Bern: Francke, 1957 would be on the right even of the "maximalists." The categorizing of Jesus' Lives as "minimal" and 'maximal' is proposed by H.K. McArthur, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-208. See also the balanced treatment of C. Perrot, *Jesus et l'Histoire*, Paris: Desclee, 1979.
 47. As usual, Popularization came twenty years behind the scholarly research and the Seventies saw a proliferation of popularized expositions of "demythologized" Gospels like Evelyn's *Gospel without Myth*.
 48. In *Jesus within Judaism. New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library) New York: Doubleday, 1988, J.H. Charlesworth surveys "thirty-eight noteworthy books dedicated to Jesus research" between 1980 and 1984 (pp. 187-207) and that in English only.
 49. See the concise bibliographical survey presented by L. Boadt, in *Biblical Studies. Meeting Ground of Jews and Christians*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, pp. 6-7 and the various studies contained in the same volume.
 50. Cf. J. pierron, "A New Biblical Discovery: The Neofiti Codex", in *IES* 2 (1963), pp. 304-312.
 51. Cf. V. Tzaferis, "Crucifixion, the Archeological Evidence", in *BAR* 11 (1985), pp. 44-53; J. Zias and E. Sekeles, "The Crucified Man from Giv'at ha-Mitvar: A Reappraisal" in *BA* 48 (1985), pp. 190-191; R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the four Gospels*, vol. 2, New York: Doubleday, 1994. pp. 949-952.
 52. Cf. E.M. Meyers, E. Netzer and C.L. Meyers, "Sephoris 'Ornament of Galilee'", *BA* 49 (1986), pp. 1-18.
 53. Cf. F. Mussner, *Traite sur les Juifs*, Paris: Cerf, 1981, p. 193.
 54. G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, London: Collins (Fontana Paperbacks), 1973. See also by the same author, *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.
 55. Cf. D. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of christianity*, Jerusalem; Magnes Press, 1988. The long bibliography of the writings of Flusser can be found in Malcolm Lowe (ed.), *The New Testament and Christian-Jewish Dialogue. Studies in Honor of David Flusser, Immanuel* 24-25, (1990), pp. 293-305.
 56. G. Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987; *The Miracle Stories of Early Christian Tradition*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983; *The Shadow of the Galilean*, Philadelphia: fortress, 1987.
 57. J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus' Jewishness. Exploring the place of Jesus in Early Judaism*, New York: Crossroad, 1991, pp. 271-279.
 58. *ibid*; p. 15
 59. L. Boff, *Passion of christ, Passion of the World*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987, p. 129.

60. "It is only at the heart of a practice aiming at the *in-surrection* of the bodies that the question can be posed validly of their re-surrection" (M. Clevenot, *Materialist Approaches to the Bible*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 124).
61. Document released on 23.4.1993 on the occasion of the centenary of the Encyclical of Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus* and of the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical of Pius XII *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Indian edition by NBCLC, Bangalore, 1994.
62. Particularly the discovery in 1945, at Nag Hammadi in Egypt, of the library of a 4th c monastery containing, among many other mostly Gnostic writings, the Gospels of Thomas and Philip, the gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of Mary, etc. part of which may go back to the 2d c. AD.
63. A team of American scholars has recently published *The Complete Gospels* (Sonoma: Pleridge Press, 1992) which, in addition to the four canonical Gospels contains the (reconstituted) Q source and a number of apocryphal Gospels.
64. Cf. J.H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*. *Op. cit.*; R.A. Horsley, "The Historical Jesus and Archeology of Galilee: Questions from Historical Jesus Research to Archeologists", in *SBL 1994 Seminar Papers*, pp. 91-135.
65. A summary can be found in J.P. Meier, "Reflections on Jesus-of-History Research Today", in J.H. Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-107; "Jesus" in *NJBC*, pp. 1316-1328; J.P. Michaud, "Un etat de la recherche sur le Jesus de l'histoire", in *Eglise et Theologie* 26 (1995), pp. 143-164.
66. J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus. The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, San Francisco: Harper, 1991; *Jesus. A Revolutionary Biography*, San Francisco: Harper, 1994.
67. J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, (coll. Anchor Bible Reference Library), New York: Doubleday, t.1, 1991; t.2, 1994.
68. J.P. Meier, "Reflections", *art. cit.*, p. 84.
69. R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2 vol. (The Anchor Bible Reference Library), New York: Doubleday, 1994, pp. 1317-1349.
70. J.P. Meier, *art. cit.*, p. 107.

Jesus of History and Jesus of Faith

The quest for the historical Jesus has been unprecedented in recent years among Biblical critics. The author of the article shows how the face of the speaker or writer could be recognised in their presentations of Jesus' life. In the reflections on the Jesus of history and Jesus of faith some of the major points clarified are how the one is related to the other and why Christians want to discover the Jesus of History. We are also warned of the danger of separating the one from the other.

A common experience of many as they read the historian's description of Jesus of Nazareth or the theologian's or preacher's presentation of Jesus Christ is to recognise the face of the writer or speaker and the "spirit of the time" in Jesus. Some years ago a certain person wrote about this phenomenon when he compared it to a well with the face of the writer at the bottom.

1. The Scandal

At the beginning of our reflections we need to look at the reality and the problem directly. The credal statements and description about Jesus of Nazareth of the earliest believers found in the Scriptures seem to be incredible. We need to pause and realise the fantastic leap made by them. However great you think Jesus of Nazareth was in comparison with other great Jewish religious figures, you cannot but be utterly astonished when you realise that within twenty years of his shameful and scandalous death on a cross he is not only called but believed to be the Son of God and Lord, the ultimate and definitive figure in all of God's dealings with the human family, on whom the destiny of every human person and history itself depend. Every reasonable human must admit that a sensible person has every right to question the claims of the Christian community about Jesus of Nazareth.

We need to look at the dying Jesus and understand why his disciples all fled and why the religious leaders had him killed. We need to look at the crucified figure and be aware that there is little or even nothing in the whole scene to lead one to claim any thing more of this Jesus than that it is possible or probable that he was innocent and belonged to a line of prophetic figures, just men of God, who had been killed by ordinary sinful people. There are plenty of reasons to

feel sympathy for him, a good person certainly but apparently a failure as life would go on as before after his burial. One needs to face the "apparent stupidity" of the earliest Christians who said that God was supremely present in and through this Jesus and revealed Himself in a new and, in some sense, culminating way as to have him taken up into a world which is exclusively divine.

One challenge to Christians is to face the incredible beliefs of our earliest ancestors. Another challenge is to look at the numerous and diverse descriptions of the historical Jesus given over the last thirty years, rather than the last hundred years.¹ Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Every picture of him has been drawn according to the ideology, culture, social status, character and belief-system of the writer. These diverse and at times contradictory responses to the question 'Who was Jesus' remain a problem.

2. Clarifications

a. Real and Historical

Before taking up the question of the Jesus of History and Jesus of Faith I wish to clarify some points. First of all we need to distinguish between the "real" Jesus and the "historical" Jesus or Jesus of history.² Because of the lack of sources and the type of sources which we have, be they biblical or otherwise, the Jesus who lived in Galilee after the death of Herod and died on the cross is forever lost to us. The sources enable us only to reconstruct a historical Jesus using the scientific tools proper to the historical reconstruction of a figure of the past.

b. Faith/Belief

The second clarification concerns the use of the term "faith". I want to distinguish between "faith" and "belief" – belief system. I am using faith in the sense some theologians use the term in discussions at least of method in theology.³ Faith is that personal self-gift to God who reveals Himself through some historical medium. There is the mutual, yet very diverse self giving, initiated by God to which a human person responds and thus a most fundamental relationship is established. This relationship is articulated in all the historical, cultural, verbal and non - verbal expressions which accompany the human self-gift and give content to the divine self-revelation and its medium. Yet the mutual self-gift is not and cannot be identified with any of the expressions which mediate God's self-gift in self revelation and the human person's self-gift in response. The word "father" for example has the potential to reveal God and to carry a human person's self gift

in trusting response but the term is neither God nor the human person's self-gift as such.

Distinguished from "faith" stands belief - belief systems all of which are conditioned by some culture, history and circumstances and are ultimately relative. These are symbolic and are not to be identified with the reality of God nor the human self-gift as such. These include the whole Bible, liturgy, rites, rituals, art, music, law, structures of institutions, theologies, teaching of the magisterium. In consequence often when we use the phrase "Jesus of Faith" or "Christ of Faith" we confuse faith with belief. There is one Jesus to whom we are united in "faith" and there are many Jesuses whom we describe in words, relate to by actions, represent in art, worship in rituals... and all are the Jesuses of belief systems, and interpretations which have more or less permanent value.

3. The Historical Jesus

When we reflect on the historical Jesus at least one of the major questions is to clarify the reasons why Christians (and others) want to discover the historical Jesus and how the historical Jesus relates to the Jesus of Faith and the Jesuses of belief. First of all we need to consider some aspects of the whole question of the historical Jesus.

The historical Jesus is a human reconstruction created from available sources using a variety of methods to make and guide the reconstruction. At times it would be more correct to use the term construct as the subjective element so dominates the process that the end product of popular or quasi-scientific method is an obvious distortion.

a. Basic Data

All serious students of Jesus agree about some basic historical facts: Jesus of Nazareth was a historical person, lived in Palestine after Herod the Great, belonged to an ordinary family, had at least cousins, was Jewish in culture and religion and was a teacher and healer, was put to death on a cross, the responsibility for his death is disputed, though the colonial power has some role in the person of Pilate. He apparently spent most of his life in Galilee, came at least once to Jerusalem and was a public and in some way an influential and controversial figure for an undetermined period of time with some following among the people. Apparently he was a contemporary of John the Baptist. His mother's name was Mariam and his father probably Joseph.

b. Judaism

As soon as we move away from generalised and brute facts, differences emerge in the description of Jesus. This divergence has a number of causes. It is important what sources are used and especially the sources which enable a historian to grasp more and more the reality of Judaism contemporary with Jesus.⁴ In Meier's first volume we have an extensive description of the normal sources used.⁵ Crossan has introduced new sources, namely all the material which will enable us to enter the world and culture of the Greco-Roman world and of the Mediterranean.⁶

c. Methods to discover Sayings - Deeds of Jesus

As equally important are the methods with which the historian studies these sources to return to the historical Jesus. The historical critical method has refined its methodological study of the Gospels (and other sources) to sift the sayings and deeds to be found in the Gospels to find those which can be attributed to the historical Jesus.⁷ Crossan has added further sophistication to the methods.⁸ Sociological and anthropological approaches to the immediate and larger world and culture of Jesus have thrown further light on his teaching, his actions and his possible self understanding.⁹ However the problem with all methods is summarised in an article on Crossan's book.¹⁰ Methods may enable us to discover and yet often lead us to impose on our data and so construct and not reconstruct.

d. Pre-understanding

Finally there is the major problem of ideology, the whole world of the historian's pre-understanding in all its complexity and unconscious aspects. Students of the historical Jesus must be as much as possible aware of the principles and pre-conceptions with which they are working.

When we look at the more recent reconstructions of the historical Jesus we are brought face to face with difficulties. The difficulties not only concern what teachings and deeds and facts are historically probable, but the more important aspect of our interpretation of the historical Jesus - his purpose, his self-understanding, his consciousness and the ways other people placed him within their religious world. Who was Jesus for his contemporaries and who was he for himself?.

e. Recent Reconstructions

We have the Jesus of Thiering, Spong and Wilson (all in 1992), more popular in their presentation, some insights and yet flawed.¹¹ Nolan's Jesus is very appealing and Borg's Jesus attractive, a spirit filled social prophet, a wise man with his subversive politics of mercy. Sanders has written a careful study of Jesus, a charismatic autonomous prophet committed to the eschatological renewal of Israel while Vermes has a distinctly Jewish Jesus, a hashid, miracle worker and teacher, a disillusioned man; Wright's Jesus has a clear sense of destiny, a prophetic just man whose death and resurrection will be the culmination of God's plan for "Israel"; while Meier's provisional description of Jesus at the end of two volumes of *The Marginal Jew* is of an eschatological prophet of a kingdom both future and yet made present in his miracles, an authoritative interpreter of the Mosaic Law; Crossan's Jesus fits into the world of eastern mediterranean peasantry as a peasant jewish cynic promoting religious and economic egalitarianism; Ben Meyer's Jesus has a profound sense of authority and responsibility within the story of God's final purpose for Israel's restoration.¹² There are many other portraits.

Each highlights some facets, gives interpretations of Jesus and responds to the needs of certain authors and a certain reading public and theological projects.

4. Why Search for the Historical Jesus?

The fact that Jesus of Nazareth lived and is at the centre of a world religion which claims great importance for the historical character of his life, demands that attempts be made to reconstruct the historical Jesus. What is the value and need of these reconstructions for one who relates to Jesus as Lord in Faith and who lives within the christian religion.

Before this question is taken up we should remember that during Jesus' life people experienced God's self revelation through him, responded to the God of Israel through him and built up around him a belief system. Some did this in a positive way, seeing Jesus as a very special man of God and others in a negative way seeing him as a blasphemer... Jesus himself related to God in faith through God's historical revelation to him and responded in faith and built up his own belief system. Though the historian can concentrate on the search for the authentic sayings, deeds, understandings of Jesus... he can also investigate the belief system and the actuality of faith of the people

who knew Jesus and attempt to describe this belief system.

i. Historical Medium of Revelation: "Son of God is Jesus"

There are many diverse reasons for seeking to reconstruct the historical Jesus. We could begin with a reversal of the usual creedal statement, Jesus is the Son of God in terms of "The Son of God is Jesus".¹³ This underlines the fact that God's self revelation-- and this self revelation is of primary importance in Christian faith-- has been made through Jesus of Nazareth (including and not solely his resurrection or death-resurrection) and is not able to be separated from the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Both faith and christian belief systems are inextricably bound up with the historical (real) life of Jesus of Nazareth and cannot be thought of without this historical foundation.

There are aspects of Jesus' real life which can never be changed and which are necessary for the Christian religion to exist. We cannot make these types of changes for example: male to a female, jew to gentile, crucified and died to died in old age, buried body to a burnt body, rejected by sections of his contemporaries to a king and priest chosen by his people, lived in the time of the Herods, Pilate, Caiaphas to lived in the time of Constantine, teacher and miracle worker to a blind, dumb, deaf and an unknown peasant... The rootedness of faith and belief in this historical man's life is essential.

ii. Need of Continuity within Discontinuity

We also need to reconstruct the historical Jesus because of the problems related to continuity-discontinuity who Jesus thought he was and whom his contemporaries thought he was and what the faith community believed him to be. Are we able to find substantial continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, Lord and Son of God? Is the Jesus Christ of Christian belief and worship such an interpretation and reinterpretation of Jesus of Nazareth that the Jesuses of belief are a serious distortion, a creation of the community from its diverse needs and surrounding religious belief systems as is often claimed. The continuity will be beyond "titles" and related to the manner in which Jesus understood himself to be found in his actions, thought and understanding of his life and death within God's plan and the jewish religious story of God's purposes, with those constraints which protect his authentic humanity. There will be obvious discontinuity created by the experience of God's self revelation in the resurrection of Jesus and consequently the meaning of Jesus Christ.

iii. Jesus Christ of Belief Systems - A Spoilt Image?

We are also faced with problems related to the Jesus Christ of belief systems and the lives of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ of the belief systems is like what the paintings of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel were before having been cleaned. Centuries of theological reflection, popular piety and christian propaganda, all conditioned by culture, ideological biases, socio-economic forces, political abuse of organised religion, have discoloured, distorted, emasculated the true Jesus Christ, or over-emphasised or forgotten key aspects of the Jesus Christ of the NT. The NT itself is witness to a plurality of interpretations of Jesus Christ and one Jesus Christ can push into the background or even obliterate other needed interpretations of Jesus Christ. In the popular mind, Jesus Christ is for so many just God, the Gospels are pure biographies and the "historical Jesus" is often a tamed figure or a divinised figure. A serious search for both the historical Jesus and the Jesuses of the Gospels is an ever needed corrective. I am horrified by how widespread and deep is the popular divinisation of Jesus of Nazareth among even well educated christians.

iv. The Distorted Lives of Jesus

On the other side, the portraits of the historical Jesus, the "lives" of Jesus are often more paintings of the writers than of Jesus of Nazareth. Serious study with the aim of reconstructing the historical Jesus enables us to sift and discard obvious distortions and allow the serious reconstructions to dialogue with each other. From this dialogue will emerge a figure who must be ever enigmatic and yet a figure who will challenge both the "lives" and the Jesus Christs of some theological systems and piety.

v. Theologies of Religions

The serious study of religions also leads to a search for the historical Jesus. One wonders why it took Christians so long to find God in living religions. A major challenge to Christian theology is posed by these living religions in and through which the God of all reveals himself and people respond in faith and are saved. This is related to Jesus Christ's saving role. What has happened is that some thinkers have not only distinguished Jesus Christ from the Jesus of history but actually have separated him from Jesus of Nazareth. Whether it is the Logos Jesus Christ of John, or the Image - first born of all creation - beloved Son of Colossians, "Christ" becomes for some more an idea than a name for the person Jesus of Nazareth, Christ and

Lord. The particularity of the real Jesus is a scandal and in various ways forgotten. The continuous search for the historical Jesus and insistence that the historical person and his life are essential for any christian theology of Jesus Christ's role in the salvation of all are a corrective to some theologies of religions.

vi. In Front of the Text Hermeneutics

For a particular type of hermeneutics and contextual theology the historical Jesus plays a key role. Dalit, tribal, black, feminist theology and various types of liberation theology want to return behind the interpretations of Jesus in the Gospels (and Letters) to the historical Jesus (in some minds to the real Jesus) and to build a theology on *the praxis of Jesus of Nazareth*. Indications of this are statements like "the situation of Jesus is similar to our situation"; "Jesus' attitude to women was different to that of his people and the way it is portrayed in the Gospels is too conditioned by patriarchy"; "Jesus was a dalit", "the real Jesus has been lost in the Gospel Jesus Christ..."

5. Return to the Historical Jesus

This return to the historical Jesus creates some problems. Supposing we are able to adequately reconstruct the praxis of the historical Jesus, reflected in his deeds or words or attitudes, what value does this historical reconstruction have in the process of doing theology? A more difficult question would be were we to judge that the praxis of the historical Jesus has been in some way lost in the Gospels' interpretation of Jesus, or a Gospel's interpretation of Jesus. Does the reconstruction of the historical Jesus have a primary role in the dialogue between context and text, in the process of theologising and spelling out Christian praxis? Have the Gospels' interpretations the primary and any reconstruction of the historical Jesus only a supplementary role? I do not judge that the faith and enunciation of belief by a Christian is based on or can be based ultimately on any reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The primary partner in dialogue must be the Jesus Christ to be found in the Scriptural texts, however conditioned they may be. Related to this is the question whether we can use a reconstruction of the historical Jesus to correct the interpretations of Jesus found in the Gospels or Letters. I do not think this can be done. The reconstruction may help us to analyse the interpretative process whose culmination is found in the Gospels and Letters and help us in a process of understanding these canonical texts. The historical Jesus may help students of the Gospels to correct wrong presuppositions

they have and help them to find the true human face of Jesus in the Jesus Christ of the Gospels but not replace the gospel Jesus Christ.

6. Critique of Some "Hermeneutics"

At times the return to the "historical Jesus" by "in front of the text" forms of popular hermeneutics is a search for some crumbs on which to build the ideology we want, or to make sacred some idea, attitude or action which is said to be the same as the historical Jesus. At times we forget that the "historical Jesus" is to be found in the Gospels themselves or the Letters of Paul and not "behind" the Gospel narratives. At times we search for a "humanist" Jesus, a "human" Jesus, a secular Jesus because the Jesus Christ of so much current piety and types of theology is so divinised that his human face has been lost. However the "historical Jesus" of the Gospel texts has a very distinct and fascinating human face.

The reconstructed life, attitudes, actions and thoughts of the historical Jesus be blueprints for christian thought action except to the extent that we return to some basic and normative characteristics of Jesus of Nazareth which we find always, in his life and in his life told by the narrators of the Gospel stories, profoundly conditioned by contemporary culture, religion, history and situations. I do not judge that there can be a major conflict between the "historical Jesus" painted by the Gospel writers (Paul) and any acceptable reconstructed Jesus of history.¹⁴

7. Feminist Reconstruction of Jesus

As an example we shall look at some popular feminist theology. We look for scenes with women and count them. We compare Jesus' behaviour in these scenes with what is reconstructed to be contemporary jewish attitudes and praxis using a few sayings. Then we make this Jesus the model for a feminist critique of modern christian and ecclesiastical society. However, we fail to account for the overwhelming patriarchal character of his teaching, the suspicious nature of a picture of Jewish attitudes based on some later texts and the patriarchal conditioning of Jesus' actions and consciousness. In the process we take him out of his world. I see no reason to say that Jesus was not patriarchal in his world view and had all what we today would call feminist consciousness and concern.

What we miss is the more fundamental attitude of the Jesus of the Gospels (and I presuppose that of Jesus of Nazareth) to God as limitless

self giving to all, the human as the fundamental concern of God to be respected above all, and the choices made by Jesus to be at the service of some of the persons most disadvantaged within the circles in which he moved. I do not believe that all the disadvantaged were the concern of Jesus as he was limited like any other human person by time, place and opportunity. However the Gospel writers do portray a Jesus of Nazareth who is Christ and Lord committed to the disadvantaged who can be the basis for the fundamental aspects of feminist theology but not a blueprint for contemporary enunciation of this theology nor contemporary praxis. There is an obligation on each generation to reinterpret the Gospel because we do not find the strategy for action and the enunciation and ways of retelling the story which are intelligible and efficacious in diverse cultures, to diverse groups and diverse challenges neither in the Gospels themselves nor in theologies which arose in different contexts. We need to go through a long and careful process before we speak of a "Dalit Jesus Christ". We need to note that a "Dalit Jesus" is not the ultimate partner of theological dialogue but a "Dalit Jesus Christ."

The reconstructions of the historical Jesus serve as correctives in this process, play the role of catalysts for good interpretation of the actual Gospel stories making us aware of aspects we may miss, undervalue, misinterpret, omit..

8. Jesus of Faith/Christ of Faith

I wish to comment on two presuppositions which are at times at work often unconsciously. The first is the danger of separating Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus of the Gospels and Letters and implying that the authentic Jesus is the man of Nazareth and not the Jesus who is named Lord, Son of God and Christ. One Jesus is played off against the other Jesus. The enunciations which arose after the faith experience related to the resurrection (revelation of God and indirectly of Jesus) and their development over about 50 to 60 years as witnessed to in the NT are looked upon as suspect and inherently as distortions. However, no one who knew Jesus of Nazareth and was responsible for speaking about him (interpreting him for others after his death) would have ever thought of distinguishing between the historical (real) Jesus and the Jesus of the post resurrection period. For these people Jesus always revealed God to them and was in some way intimately linked to that revelation of God.

The second aspect is the idea that we have one Christ of Faith, one interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth was understood in different ways by his own disciples and people and the Jesus Christ of the Gospels and Letters are indeed many.¹⁵ The "historical Jesus" of the Gospels and Letters has also many faces. All interpretations of a person or of oneself are multifaceted and different aspects come to the fore in different circumstances and in response to different needs and perceptions of needs. What we look for are some fundamental major threads running through and across different interpretations not to create uniformity but to preserve great diversity and a fundamental unity. This interplay of unity and diversity to be found in the NT portraits of Jesus of Nazareth is the basis for an on going interpretation. The reconstructions of the historical Jesus, the more carefully they are made, enable us again to meet an enigmatic person because no label, no sociological model, no description is adequate to hold together the diversity and unity of the man of Nazareth who is Jesus, the Christ, Lord, Son of God and Saviour. He remains so fascinating, and challenging and can not be tamed or replaced by the interpreter's face.

Vidyajyoti, College of Theology,
23, Raj Nivas Marg
Delhi - 110 054.

Paddy, Meagher

Footnotes

1. A concise and ordered summary can be found in "The Portraits and the Puzzles" in *Who Was Jesus?* by N.T. Wright, SPCK, 1992, pp. 1-8
2. I am indebted to John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking The Historical Jesus*. Doubleday, 1991, Volume I, p. 21-24.
3. I depend for this clarification on Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology*, Paulist Press, 1990, Parts I, II, IV. I omit the discussions of the symbolic nature of belief language and primary and secondary articulations...
4. There are an increasing number of studies of pre-70CE Judaism. All recent authors agree on the complexity of this Judaism and warn against the danger of caricatures or simplifications. A concise summary with some pertinent bibliography can be found in "The Jewish Context of the New Testament" by Govey W.E. Nickelsburg in *The New Interpreters Bible A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Abingdon Press, 1995, Vol VIII, p. 27-42. A major study would be E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief*, 63 B.C.E. - 66 C.E. Trinity Press International, 1992. Cf James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, SPCK, 1988 and edited by him *Jesus' Jewishness*. Exploring the Place of Jesus in Early Judaism, Crossroads, 1991.
5. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Chs 2.3.4.5.

6. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus. The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, T.T. Clark, 1991, especially Parts 1 and 11.
7. Among many critical summaries of these methods see "How Do We Decide What Comes from Jesus?" in Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, pp. 167-184 and the extensive notes pp. 185-195.
8. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, "Appendix 1. An Inventory of the Jesus Tradition by Chronological Stratification and Independent Attestation" pp. 427-450. He makes a synchronic and stratified study of the sources of the Jesus tradition and then of the sayings of Jesus. The sources include most parts of the NT, Apocryphal Gospels and Writings, Didache, Letters of Apostolic Fathers, hypothetical sources of the Gospels (eg. Q, Book of Signs, Secret Mark...) and the Gospels.
9. Extensive bibliography on social science approaches can be found in Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*. A much needed critique is made by Frans Jozef Van Beeck, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus. Origins, Achievements, and the Specter of Diminishing Returns" in *Jesus and Faith. A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan*, author of *The Historical Jesus*, edited by Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig, Orbis Books, 1994, pp. 83-99.
10. Bernard Brandon Scott "To Impose is not/ To Discover" Methodology in John Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*" in *Jesus and Faith*, pp. 22-30.
11. See Wright, *Who Was Jesus*. He describes the books by the titles of the relevant chapters: *Jesus in Code*, *A Moderately Pale Galilean* and *The Bishop and The Birth*.
12. Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Orbis Books, 1976/1985; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision*, Harper and Row, 1987; and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. The Historical Jesus and The Heart of Contemporary Faith*. Harper San Francisco, 1994; G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, Collins, 1973; E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, SCM Press, 1985 and *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, The Penguin Press, 1993; Wright, "Jesus Revisited" in *Who Was Jesus*, pp 93-103; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol II, pp. 1045-46; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* which concludes: "The historical Jesus was, then, a peasant Jewish Cynic... But his work was among the farms and villages of Lower Galilee. His strategy, implicitly for himself and explicitly for his followers, was the combination of free healing and common eating, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power... He announced, in other words, the brokerless kingdom of God" pp. 421-22; a more accessible version of his scholarly work is found in *Jesus. A Revolutionary Biography*, Harper San Francisco, 1994; Ben F. Meyer, "Jesus Christ" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, Doubleday, 1992, pp 773-796.
13. In one of his recent books Sobrino writes: "Although it may seem a play on words, everything is decided by the choice to give methodological priority to one of these statements: 'Jesus is Christ' or 'Christ? He's Jesus'". Jon Sobrino, *Jesus The Liberator. A Historical - Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, Burns and Oates, 1993, p. 40.
14. In relation to the historical Jesus we are reminded of the actual constraints of his particular culture and religion on the real Jesus by A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, Duckworth, 1992. At times authors do not respect the limits placed on Jesus of Nazareth and popular piety and homilists often flout these constraints.
15. A classical exposition of this tantalizing diversity within an enriched unity is James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in The New Testament. An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd Edition, SCM Press, 1990.

JESUS THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPELS

The Gospels, the basic documents of Christian faith, have been under critical scrutiny ever since Renaissance. The quest for the historical Jesus brought a lot of incertitude regarding the content of the Gospels and led some to the conclusion that they deal with Christ of faith and not with Jesus of history. This article is an attempt to critically evaluate such a conclusion taking into account the recent Life-of-Jesus research.

1. A New Galileo?¹

Living at the dawn of the powershift era, we should expect the unexpected to happen in all areas of life including the religious. In the words of Alvin Toffler, "Campuses are stirring from Berkely to Rome and Taipei preparing to explode" because "the powershift does not merely transfer power but transforms it"². The social scientist, Arjun Appadurai describes the emerging "global culture" on the basis of the central reality of cultural flow which he calls "deterritorialization". There are five interrelated dimensions for this "cultural flow", namely, ethnoscares, technoscares, finanscares, mediascares and ideoscares.³ Hence there is no question of totally independent, compartmentalized and self-enclosed life. There is an interdisciplinary character for everything and one cannot escape it.

Viewed from this context one can immediately find the relevance of the radical questions asked by the believers today about the very basis of faith, namely, the historicity of the person of Jesus on the basis of the gospel narrations. This kind of Jesus research has various implications for the life of faith. The radical questioning is really a "deterritorialization" in the field of faith. It makes the flow within the faith culture that leads to transformation. Hence there is a permanent relevance of understanding of historical Jesus for the ongoing Christian tradition. One who believes in him, can never be indifferent to the efforts to discover the historical Jesus.⁴

Arun Shourie articulates it still more radically and critically when he states: "What has actually happened is that Christianity has really lost its foundational beliefs because of the progress of science and technology.... You say, every word in the Bible is true. But the book of Genesis cannot now be believed nor the story of creation. The claims

of the church have been undermined ever more by biblical scholarship. It has now been seen that on every single point in the life of Jesus, far from other historical evidence, the four gospels contradict each other completely...."⁵.

That the biblical scholarship after the Enlightenment and Renaissance has revolutionized the understanding of the Bible is an undeniable fact. So also the consequences of such a revolution. When the results of the radical Jesus seminar was published recently, with the image of Jesus as different from the traditional one, it could be sensed that iconoclasm is happening once again. These iconoclasts believe that biblical Jesus was a myth created by Church-building Christians, decades after crucifixion. Naturally this is scandalous, shaking the ordinary belief at very root... every important article of the traditional Christian faith goes out of the window... It appears to be a new "Galileo" demanding the church not to resist looking through the telescope⁶. It is "demythologization" in a new form. It is a challenge to reevaluate and reformulate the claim that Christianity must remain untouched, undamaged and thus the church is to retain the core element of its existence. Here the choice is between being either creative and liberative or destructive and oppressive. Positively, the challenge is to acknowledge that Christian identity is inevitably the product of a process of dynamic interaction and selective reconstruction.

Whoever searches for the authentic image of Jesus is wonderstruck by the terribly Kaleidoscopic variety. J.D. Crossan considers "this stunning diversity an academic embarrassment".⁷ There is a tendency to move from the diversity to inauthenticity and lack of historicity which is an unwarranted process.

The recent radical developments regarding these foundational beliefs of Christianity, on the oneside, does not in any way bring anything new because the quest for historical Jesus in the last century had the same characteristic marks of radicality. On the other side, it is radically new on account of the drastically new directions that have been introduced in the field of biblical scholarship. These new forms of the quest clarifies that it is not a mere quest for excavating the fossilized Jesus of history and then getting finished with it but it is an ongoing process. Such absolutizing of conclusions would be a mistake because they are not conclusive and historical enough. The search has to go on. But it does challenge us anew, not to be indifferent to the root of faith, even to allow the iconoclasm to happen in our

personal lives. Historical research not only compels us to recognize change. It also shows us what is actually happening, that is, that the type of idea employed for the expressions of religious truth becomes increasingly spiritual.⁸

In the context of this discussion, the question that crops up is the old and yet new one. Are the Gospels fact or fiction? Do they contain only Christ of faith? If so, Gospels can be no basis for understanding the real historical Jesus? Are these radical challenges and the basis-shaking questions imply enough for the church to leave all that is part of the traditional faith life as irrelevant and useless? Is the Christian community, with all its institutionalized, theologized and rationalized solutions really based on a fictitious Jesus only? Or does respect for historical events compel our faith to give up the "naivete" and to admit that it has been subject to development?⁹ What is the process that has been taking place between Jesus of History and Christ of faith? Is it merely the explicitation of the implicit? Or was there anything that was already explicit in the consciousness of Jesus?

2. Historical Quest

Concerning the relationship between the Christology of Jesus' ministry and the Christology of the New Testament, it is really interesting to note that 1700 years went by without hardly any question and answer.¹⁰ So about 17 centuries the historicity of the gospels went virtually unquestioned except for a very few voices here or there. Albert Schweitzer, analysing this issue says, "It is only at first sight that the absolute indifference of early Christianity towards the life of historical Jesus is disconcerting.... It (Christianity) felt that with the introduction of the historic Jesus unto its faith, there would arise something new, something which had not been present in the thoughts of the Master himself and that thereby a contradiction would be brought to light, the solution of which would constitute one of the great problems of the world. Primitive Christianity was therefore right to live wholly in the future with the Christ who was to come and to preserve of the historic Jesus only detached sayings, a few miracles, His death and resurrection. By abolishing both the world and the historical Jesus it escaped the inner division described above, and remained consistent in its point of view...."¹¹ Thus, with the emergence of philosophical - rationalistic - critical methods for studying the Gospels, doubts about the historicity became widespread.

Reimarus who introduced scepticism regarding the super-natural

elements in the Gospels, was followed by D.F. Strauss of the liberal school who tried to find out the meaning of the "myths" and hence unlike rationalists believed in the historicity of Jesus and then by L. Kahler who distinguished the faith of the historian from the faith of the Christian which is based on Christ of faith. R. Bultmann believed that the preaching of the community is the basis of faith and that demythologizing is necessary in order to distinguish the Jesus of history and Christ of faith. Bultmann accepted thus, a "functional equivalence" between the christological proclamation and Jesus' proclamation¹². Jesus preached the kingdom and church preached Jesus. The challenges offered by Jesus are now offered by the church and hence there is functional equivalence.¹³

The conclusion from this rational, historically sceptical approach and the consequent confusion is that the Gospels contain only the Christ of faith and not the Jesus of history. At this juncture it is good to review the attempts to transcend the historical scepticism.

3. Beyond Historical Scepticism

Beyond the non-scholarly liberalism and non-scholarly conservatism which are two wrong extremes, there are other possibilities¹⁴. Joachim Jeremias reacted to Bultmann's scepticism by applying the *Formgeschichte* to the parables and the eucharistic words of Jesus¹⁵. He wanted to prove the possibility of returning to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus through the gospel narrations. He studied the 'Amen' sayings and 'Abba' texts of the Gospels in order to show the historical surety.¹⁶ At the end of the study of 15 'Abba' passages (19 with Parallels) he concludes, "we cannot be sure of the authenticity of each of 15 passages... but the address itself is without question an incontestable character of the 'ipsissima vox' of Jesus".¹⁷ So also concluding the research into the 13 'Amen' sayings, he writes, "so in the Amen-sayings too we have the emergence of a new and completely unique manner of speaking. And once again, the new form is matched by a new content. Here is a consciousness of rank which lays claim to divine authority. Once again we have here without question an incontestable linguistic characteristic of the 'ipsissima vox' of Jesus"¹⁸.

N. Perrin in his book, *Rediscovering the teaching of Jesus* proposes four criteria for determining the authenticity of the words of Jesus: antiquity, multiple attestation, discontinuity, and coherence. These criteria are based on the semitic character, attestation by more than one source, differences from the contemporary rabbinic teaching of the church and the logical coherence with the other sayings of Jesus.

These criteria, certainly, cannot be considered final because each of these brings up problems which are not easily solvable, or decisions which are not conclusive. It would be audacious to say that something is not antique on the basis of language alone. Multiple attestation need not be final criterion because there are texts which are singly attested and yet considered authentic. Discontinuity need not be a final indication to the originality of Jesus and to the authenticity. However Perrin's attempt showed that universal doubt about authenticity is invalid.

Riesenfeld B. Gerhardsson, H. Schuermann, Riesner, Harvey and others also attempted in various ways to show the possibility of historical relationship between Jesus and the Gospels. They gave importance to one of the other aspects of the ways of transmitting the tradition, thus taking a radical critical position with regard to the *Formgeschichte*. Rabbinic methods of transmitting the tradition, the possibility of seeing the *Sitz-im-Leben* of Jesus as the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the community because Jesus lived together with the apostles in some kind of a community, and the phenomenon of teaching and learning in the schools and rabbinic circles of Palestine etc. were the areas of discussion by the above said scholars. E. Kasemann and then G. Bornkamm had already reacted to their teacher, R. Bultmann and defended the christology which is implicit already in the historical Jesus and explicitated in the Gospels. As a result of such attempts many of the sayings of Jesus are considered authentic and coming from Jesus himself and historical scepticism itself is viewed with suspicion.

4. Jesus or Christ?

The new critical studies have brought in new doubts to the field, shaking the boredom of the beatified inertia and "taken for granted" attitude. It is challenging us to wake up. The question is still the old one: Jesus or Christ? Do Gospels contain History or Kerygma? When the iconoclasts among scholars come to the conclusion that practically 95% of everything in the gospel is merely fictional and not historical, can the believer just swallow it whole?

For a person who comes to the Gospels with the expectations they were not designed to fulfill¹⁹, the question is difficult to answer. The New Testament Scholarship has steadily eroded confidence in the historical reliability of the Gospels for whoever looks for chronological accounts, detailed conciseness in every episode recorded, pedan-

tic precision in reproducing Jesus' teaching as given word for word and such like. The fact is that the evangelists themselves were not at all interested in all such details. So the question itself is based on wrong expectation from the gospels and the failure to take them up as they are.

If the gospels do not contain the kind of history as the above said questions expect, how do we catalogue the content of the Gospel? Even the Gospel according to Luke together with the Acts of the Apostles is not catalogued as history in modern scholarship as it used to be before. Luke is more than a historian, a theologian. "His narrative does not function as the Kerygma's historical foundation, nor is it biography. It is to be classified rather as Kerygmatic History"²⁰. This characterization is valid for all the Gospels. Gospels contain kerygmatic history.

Does that mean that they do not contain history at all? The radical Jesus seminar has prepared a colour coded gospel text on the basis of authenticity. They have catalogued the sayings of Jesus into four categories, namely, Jesus undoubtedly said something like this, probably from Jesus, doubtful, Jesus never said this. The result is that the majority of the sayings of Jesus are classified as non-authentic. "An inventory of the Jesus tradition by chronological stratification and independent attestation" appended to the "Historical Jesus" of J.D. Crossan is another example of the scrutiny of the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus²¹. If so, where did they all come from? Crossan proposes three contexts in which to understand Jesus: Judaism, Greco-Roman culture and the world of the Mediterranean. The faith in the historical Jesus as "the manifestation of God" by engaging in a dialectic between "historically read Jesus and a theologically read Christ" are exemplified in christianity. The exegetical christianity is the context in which the community seeks foundational and textual understanding for themselves²². Thus when J.D. Crossan tries to explain the formation of the gospel narrative on the basis of these contexts he is moving on the basis of orality, textuality, suspicion and reconstruction.²³ The formula, according to him, behind these narration, is precisely, "Hide the prophecy, tell the narrative and invent the history". Commenting on this Frans Josef van Beeck says, "This slogan begs for disagreement because it makes the end of careful historical scholarship".²⁴ The question is whether this is reconstruction or rather projection. For example, it is not simply that Jesus died and then the meaning of his death was invented. As J.P. Meier writes, "...the

historical Jesus did threaten, disturb and infuriate people from interpreters of the law, through the Jerusalem priestly aristocracy to the Roman Prefect who finally tried and crucified him. This emphasis on Jesus' violent death is not simply a focus implored on the data by Christian theology... To outsiders like Josephus, Tacitus and Lucian of Samarota one of the most striking things about Jesus was his crucifixion or execution by Rome"²⁵. Crossan applies the social, scientific theories to scripture analysing them on the basis of ideal types. F.J. Van Beeck's critical remark is concise: "Crossan, I suggest, is right as well as frequently successful in putting ideal types to the task of illumination the world of which Jesus is part. Still he feels insufficiently aware that the application of ideal types as very different from the use of technical, much more impartial tools of analysis scripture scholars have been developing for over a century to get behind the surface meaning of texts".²⁶

Thus the apparent interpretation of data in the light of ideal types turns out to be postulating of facts or in other words, *reconstruction* ends up in construction.²⁷ So the reconstruction ultimately does not shed light on the history of the formation of the text, rather it only leads to the losing sight of history and tradition. The critical historical study of the texts have brought to light the fact that the early Christian communities were very creative and original in their expressiveness of the tradition. Since then, the study of theology of the Evangelist has become the central area of research. Now, because the early Christian communities were very creative, it should not mean that "we must picture the development of the Jesus tradition between, say 30 A.D. and 50 A.D. as a process of hectic production and manipulation of discrete texts and factors to cover up a fundamental void of recollection and information"²⁸. It would be yielding to the false theory that "truth can be found only in the unattainable lost original"²⁹.

At this point, the rigorous scientific treatment of the "historical Jesus" through an evaluation of biblical and extra biblical evidence about Jesus and a bold and sober assessment of modern scholarship of J.P. Meier calls once again for our attention. Besides the canonical Gospels, Josephus, other pagan, Jewish writings, Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels are taken into consideration and evaluated by him. After a careful study he observes that the Apocryphal Gospels, especially the Gospel of Thomas are dependent on canonical Gospels and on gnosticism. So they should not be evaluated on the same level.³⁰

But "the four Gospels are indeed difficult sources; their initial selection from the dragnet does not mean that they are guaranteed to represent the historical words and deeds of Jesus shot through Easter faith of the early church. Highly selected, ordered according to various theological programmes, canonical Gospels demand careful, critical sifting if they are to yield reliable information for the quest".³¹

The process of movement from oral tradition to written form includes the redactional activity. Redaction does not mean that the material is down right invention, manipulation and distortion and hence a block in the way to historical truth. Redaction implies real continuity through fidelity to the tradition of the community as well as specifies actions of sifting regarding the tradition in view of making it relevant. It is controlled by the principles of fidelity and relevance. Its use of undue liberty will be checked by the living traditions of the community. Hence it has to be both synchronic and diachronic in its approach, blending both harmoniously. If so reconstruction should not lead us to mere phantasy and projection.

Here we should think about the apparent contradictions and differences of data in different gospel narrations. Until the gospels were written down, there had been a lapse of 30-40 years from the time of Jesus. Oral form was the chief means of communication, then. The traditions were translated into different languages; the parallel gospels use the same major tradition for their composition which points to the first witnesses and a solid basis for historical information; then the traditions were edited and interpreted; various combinations and units were formed with different emphases and purposes; different versions took shape. The fact of the diversity of the traditions in the synoptic Gospels, such as unique, double or tripple traditions is explained, through the most commonly accepted two source hypothesis. This hypothesis accepts Markan priority and presupposes a second source which is named Q. Matthew and Luke composed their Gospels largely basing on Mark and Q and then depending on their special M and L sources respectively for their unique material.³² All these are real steps through which the formation of the Gospels has taken place. This explains the presence of apparently and sometimes really diverse data in the Gospels as they present the kerygmatic history. In other words, it is implausible to have recourse to an explanation that "within thirty years there had evolved such a coherent and consistent complex of traditions about a non-existent figure such as we have in the sources of the gospels".³³

Given this continuity, we should have recourse to historical critical method, for interpreting the Gospels. This method with its resolute commitment to philological and historical evidence will help us go back to the original traditions. That takes care of the historical dimension of the Gospels. Gospels are not simple, pure, chronological history but kerygmatic history. Hence historical critical method alone would not help us to understand the Gospels for today's believers. Historical critical method is a must but we need to go beyond that. Here we have to be open to all the new developments which are interdisciplinary as has been drawn out in the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.³⁴

Fritzeo Lentzen-Deis synthesizes in a very original way the criteria for historical judgement of Jesus tradition in the Gospel³⁵. He proposes seven criteria:

- In all possibility start from the earliest and surest sources.
- The unique and special nature of the gospel text has to be taken into consideration.
- Probably, the tradition of Jesus is more original when Jesus differs from the first communities and from the Jewish environment.
- From the words and behavior patterns of Jesus, which through the above mentioned criteria have been tested, it is possible to conclude the authenticity of still other traditions.
- Thus a certain framework of the words and deeds of Jesus can be articulated.
- The words and deeds of Jesus which have been taken as authentic are to be evaluated on the basis of comparison with each other and with the total picture of the sayings and deeds.
- The results as well as the working hypothesis should be critically tested against each other and in relation to the final comprehensive result.

J.P. Meier has a different way of formulating these criteria, cataloguing them into primary and secondary ones. The primary criteria are: Criteria of embarrassment, discontinuity, multiple attestation, coherence and rejection and execution. The secondary criteria are: traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, the vividness of narration, tendencies of the developing synoptic tradition and historical presumption.³⁶

These are, of course, not the conclusive criteria. They give us not

100% certitude but varying degrees of probability. The real investigation involves constant critical attitude so that there will be even critique of the critique but always taking the special nature of the gospel text into consideration.

5. Conclusion

If the gospels were not intended to hand over pure history, but were written with the aim of passing on kerygmatic history, is it not injustice to demand pure history from this? When J.P. Meier tries to programmatically bracket any or all theological and doctrinal concerns in order to do history, he is well aware of the meaning of objectivity. "The faith-stance", "tendez" or "world view" are real points of view.³⁷ Bracketing does not mean betraying. So also prescending from faith does not mean denying it.³⁸ The writers who describe the same event can do so from different perspectives. In other words no historian describes the facts or details only after thorough analysis. Perspectives could be various. Variety does not mean contradiction but explicitation through interpretation of one or the other aspect of the tradition. They become, thus diverse but complementary perspectives of the same reality. They include theological perspectives. Hence when attempt is made to separate Jesus from the gospel narratives, it can become a projection of one's own face.

So Jesus of history and Christ of faith should not be seen separately. Jesus is the Christ of faith of the gospels which contain kerygma and history because they are kerygmatic histories. Hence from the gospels we can go back to the *Sitz im Leben* of Jesus. Jesus the Messiah was already so during his ministry. He could have very well known about his death because this was the normal violent fate of a prophet. Added to that, if he could have applied Is 53, to himself, it was possible that Jesus was conscious of his death as meaningful in favour of humanity. Jesus was a good Jew of his times. The title "Son of God" could have been used by him to refer to his mission as filial and decisive, irreplaceable bringer of salvation in whom God is definitively present in our midst. This was a widely known expression in Judaism, close to Jesus' teaching and through Easter faith fully understood. Our understanding will not be able to contain it. Hence only faith can make us reach this truth and confess this faith.³⁹

From these original strata the interpretations in the light of Resurrection took place. Theologization, inter-culturation, reformulation,

explicitation and so on were part of that process. The Christ of faith, in fact, portrayed the meaning and significance of the person and work of the very person of Jesus. The reconstructed Jesus or the historical Jesus is not the real Jesus but only a fragmentary hypothetical reconstruction of him by modern means of research⁴⁰. But such a research opens up the possibility to check, redefine, develop, correct, confront and thus make our faith more authentic because unexamined religious life - or even antireligious life is not worth living. So research into historical Jesus should continue and the results should never be absolutized but used for authenticating our faith in the historical context, even by experiencing an "iconoclasm" and showing the willingness to look through the telescope and accepting the revelation coming through the "new Galileos" because, as Roger Dixon concluding his novel *Christ on trial* says, there will be always one unanswered question about Jesus.

St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary
 Alwaye - 683 103

Augustine Mulloor

Footnotes

1. The expression is borrowed from Jeffrey Carlson, "Crossan's Jesus and Christian Identity" in *Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the work of John Dominic Crossan*, (eds. Jeffrey Carlson, Robert A. Ludwig), Orbis Books, New York, 1994, p. 42.
2. Alvin Toffler, *Power Shift*, Bantam Books, New York, 1991, p. 34.
3. Cfr. Jeffrey Carlson, "Crossan's Jesus and Christian Identity" p. 40f.
4. Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A Ludwig (Eds.) *Jesus and Faith* p. viii.
5. *Arun Shourie and His Christian Critique*, p. 42.
6. Jeffrey Carlson, op. cit. p. 42.
7. J.D. Crossan. *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Harper, San Francisco, p. xxviii.
8. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, SCM, London, p. xv.
9. Ibid.
10. For a synthesis of the discussion on this theme cfr. Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis, "Kriterien. fur die historische Beurteilung der Jesusueberlieferung in den Evangelien" in K. Kertelge (ed.), *Ruckfrage nach Jesus* (QD.63), Freiburg, Basel, 1974, pp. 78-117
11. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 2-3.
12. R.E. Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crisis Facing the Church*, Paulist Press, New York, p.32.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. p. 22.
15. *The Parables of Jesus*, SCM, London, 1981; *The Eucharistic words of Jesus*, SCM, London, 1987.

16. *The Prayers of Jesus*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984.
17. Ibid. p.112.
18. Ibid. p. 115.
19. J.D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, SCM, London, p.27.
20. Cfr. Fearghus, O'Fearghel, *The Introduction to Luke-Acts. A study of the Role of LK 1, 1-4, 44 in the composition of Luke's two volume work*, Rome, 1988.
21. For a critical evaluation see Frans Josef Van Beeck, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus" in Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig (eds.), *Jesus and Faith*, p. 84f.
22. J.D. Crossan, "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity" in Jeffrey Carlson and Robert A. Ludwig (eds.), *Jesus and Faith*, p. 15f.
23. Frans Josef van Beeck, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus", p. 89f.
24. Ibid. p. 85f.
25. J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. 1, New York, 1991, p. 177. This statement shows the exaggeration and extreme position taken by J.D. Crossan who says that the disciples did not know anything about the death of Jesus but searched for texts to explain it. Hence it contains only prophecy historicized. Cfr. Jeffrey Carlson and R.A. Ludwig (eds.) *Jesus and Faith*, P. 15f.
26. Frans Josef Van Beeck, Op. Cit. p. 89f.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid. p. 91.
29. Ibid.
30. J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 139. cfr. also pp. 41-55
31. Ibid., p. 141.
32. For a summary of various theories: cfr. Ibid. pp. 41-45; J.P. Meier, *Law and History in Mathew's Gospel*, Rome, 1976 pp. 2-6; W.G. Kuemmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, London, 1973, pp 38-80.
33. Cfr. D.G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus*, p. 29. Cfr. also J.A. Fitzmyer, *A Christological Catechism. New Testament Answers*, Paulist Press, New York, 1982, pp. 7f.
34. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.
35. Fritzleo Lentzen - Deis, "Kriterien fur die historische Beurteilung der Jesus Uberlieferung in den Evangelien".
36. J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, pp. 168-195.
37. Ibid., pp. 4-6.
38. Ibid., pp. 30-31.
39. Fritzleo Lantzen - Deis, "Jesus-Rabbi oder Gottes Sohn" in: *Theol-Akkad* 9(1972) 27-61.
40. J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 131.

The Historical Jesus in the Johannine Christological Vision

Jesus of history should never be seen separately from the Christ of faith. The Christological vision of the fourth Gospel is the result of a threefold synthesis. Understanding this Christological vision will enable us to understand better the real and historical Jesus.

Introduction

More than two centuries of scholarly research has gone into the problem of the 'Jesus of history' in relation to the 'Christ of faith'. Today almost all agree that 'Jesus of history' and 'Christ of faith' should not be seen in isolation or separation, and that Jesus of history is the Christ of faith of the Gospels, which are kerygmatic histories. The four Gospels, present different pictures of Jesus, which does not mean that the Jesus whom they present is not 'real' or 'historical' as some authors suggest¹.

Wrong Polarity between the Historical Jesus and Christ of Faith

Any kind of polarity seen between the historical Jesus and Christ of faith is wrong. Though one can understand the historical interest of the modern man, at the time of the formation of the Gospels, there was no isolated consideration of the earthly Jesus apart from the Christ who was actually experienced as the living one. The interest of the apostles and the early Church in the words and deeds of the earthly Jesus, was only to the extent that these were important for their faith in the risen Lord. The historical interest was integrated into the concern of the faith of the first Christians.

Jesus: a Mystery to be discovered

The Gospels themselves show that the earthly Jesus was unintelligible to his contemporaries, even to his disciples. He did not let himself be classified into any known categories (Mt. 16:13f). Hence it is quite understandable that the four Gospels give four different pictures of Jesus. Variety does not mean contradiction, but the richness of the one real and historical Jesus who is ultimately a 'mystery' beyond any scientific analysis.

The fact that Jesus of the Gospels is a 'mystery' beyond any scientific analysis does not mean that he is less real or non-historical. It simply means that the real and historical Jesus cannot be fully comprehended by our critical historical analysis. Each of the four Gospels presents the real and historical Jesus in a particular perspective. In this article I am trying to trace the picture of the real and historical Jesus whom the fourth Evangelist is presenting in his Gospel.

The Historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel

Before presenting the Johannine picture of Jesus I would like to say a word about the historical reliability of the Gospel itself. Even a cursory look on the Johannine literature in the recent past will reveal the fact that St. John's Gospel is now being accepted more and more as historical just as the other three Gospels. The extreme scepticism about this Gospel as being a product of the Hellenistic world, devoid of any historical value, and having little relation to the Jesus of Nazareth has completely disappeared. This is the result of a series of unexpected archeological, documentary and textual discoveries, which forced the scholars to have a 'new look' on Johannine studies². Today there is a growing tendency to take very seriously the historical, sociological and geographical details peculiar to narratives found only in the Fourth Gospel. John's references to the Samaritans, their theology, their practice of worshipping on Gerizim, the location of Jacob's well (ch. 4), the description of the pool of Bethsatha (ch. 5), the theological themes brought up in relation to the Passover (ch. 6) and the Feast of the Tabernacles (chs. 7-8), the pool of Siloam (Jn. 9:7), Solomon's portico (Jn 10:22-23), the stone pavement (Jn. 19:13) etc are all found to be accurate. Such an accuracy presupposes in the fourth Evangelist a knowledge of Palestine as it was before its destruction in A.D. 70 when some of these landmarks perished. This is an indication that the setting in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus is placed is historical and authentic³.

John's Gospel and the Historical Jesus

It was a commonplace in the critical investigation of the historical Jesus that no reliance can be placed on the material found in John. Even the 'new quest' of the historical Jesus among the Post-Bultmannians, especially Bornkamm and Conzelmann, neglected John. In view of the evidences for the historical reliability of the Fourth Gospel, the question of the historical Jesus in the Fourth

Gospel deserves reconsideration. In fact John gives us correct historical information about Jesus that no other Gospel has preserved, for example, that like John the Baptist, Jesus had a baptizing ministry for a period before he began his ministry of teaching (Jn 4:1-3); that his public ministry lasted more than a year and that he went several times to Jerusalem (Jn 2:13; 5:1-9; 7:10); that the opposition of the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem was not confined to the last days of his life (Jn. 7:1,32-44; 8:59; 10:31; 11:53). There are many details about Jesus' passion and death which are given only by John such as the details of the process before Pilate (Jn 18:28-19:16); discussion on the title of the cross (Jn 19:19-22); parting of the vestment (Jn 19:23-25); Mary and the beloved disciple at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25-27) and piercing of the side of Jesus (Jn 19:31-37). Hence John's Gospel is as important as the Synoptic Gospels in the critical investigation of the Jesus of history.

Unity and Diversity in the Gospel presentation of Jesus

Though John's Gospel, as the Synoptic Gospels, provides data for the investigation of the historical Jesus, it is evident that the Fourth Gospel has its particular synthesis of the Jesus of Nazareth and Christ of faith. All the Gospels, while containing historical facts about Jesus, are suffused with the Easter faith of the early Church. Those who knew Jesus of Nazareth and were interpreting him for others after his death and resurrection would never have thought of distinguishing between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the post-resurrection period. For them the Christ of faith was the same as the Jesus of history. Jesus of history is not limited to his earthly ministry. He is the same as the one who lives after his death and resurrection. In the Gospels we have one Christ of faith, one interpretation of the Jesus of history. As Jesus was understood in different ways by his contemporaries, so also the evangelists interpret the same Jesus in different ways. Hence we find a unity in diversity in the Gospel presentation of Jesus.⁴

The Johannine Presentation

The Fourth Evangelist has his own picture and presentation of Jesus. But to understand this, one has to ask the important questions: "How does John 'see' Christ?" What is the hermeneutic method at work in the mind of the Evangelist, as he composed his Gospel? One has to understand the synthesis that John achieved between the historical tradition about Jesus of Nazareth and the Christian community's experience of the living Christ.

The Johannine mode of 'vision' of Christ could be qualified as that of a believing and informed witness. The components of this vision are the following:

1. His eyewitness experience of Jesus, during the time that Jesus was with him. In two places the Gospel speaks of one who was an eyewitness of the incidents in Jesus' life, one before Jesus' glorification (Jn 19:35) and the other, after the glorification (Jn 21:24).

2. The inspiration or teaching of the Paraclete. During the life-time of Jesus, the disciples could not understand Jesus properly. Only after the resurrection they received the Paraclete who helped them to understand Jesus properly (Jn 14:26; 16:12-15).

3. The Tradition of the Church. The evangelist does not stand isolated from the community in understanding and living his faith in Jesus Christ.

4. The transfer of language. The evangelist presents Jesus of Nazareth in his language. John has actually transferred his symbolic system of language back on to the lips of the historical Jesus, so that Jesus of the Fourth Gospel speaks John's language⁵.

Such a synthesis achieved by John does not take us away from the real or historical Jesus but it only helps us to understand Jesus better. Our knowledge of Jesus is only enriched by the apostolic experience, the divine inspiration, ecclesial faith-experience and cultural adaptation of the Johannine touch.

Jesus: Christ and Son of God

John himself states clearly that his purpose in writing the Gospel is to lead us to this enriched experience of the real (historical) Jesus: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and Jesus: Christ and Son of God.

Now we have to examine more closely how John presents Jesus to his readers. He uses two titles to present the Jesus of his Gospel, namely, "Christ" and "Son of God" (20:31). To understand the meaning of these titles, we have to make sure of the readers envisioned by the writer: those who already believe, or those who do not yet believe. It is difficult to decide because both the textual witnesses and the critical editions of the Greek New Testament are divided as to whether one should read an aorist subjunctive or a present subjunctive.⁶ The aorist subjunctive would mean "that you may come to faith", implying that the readers are not yet christians. The present subjunctive would mean "that you may keep believing", implying

that the readers of the Gospel are already Christian believers.

Those who think the readers as Jewish non-believers often argue that here the "Son of God" is entirely synonymous with the "Messiah" and that John is simply trying to show the Jews that Jesus is their promised Messiah. On the other hand, those who hold that the Gospel is addressed primarily to believing Christians tend to give a more profound meaning to the "Son of God", treating it either as a separate title from "Messiah" or as a special interpretation of "Messiah".

Many of the critical editions prefer the present subjunctive and the present appears as the best attested reading in a similar statement in 19:35⁷. Riesenfeld argues that the normal usage in Johannine 'hina' purpose clauses is the present tense⁸. Moreover, the aorist could also be used in the sense of having one's faith corroborated. Therefore it seems that the Evangelist is addressing primarily the believing Christians. Hence John is stressing here that Jesus is not only the Davidic Messiah of Jewish expectation, but also the unique Son of God and thus the divine Messiah.

Jesus: the Divine Messiah

The only other parallel instance in the fourth Gospel is 11:27 where Martha confesses Jesus as "Christ, the Son of God". Though for Martha, the titles might mean the traditional Jewish understanding of Messiahship, the subsequent Lazarus miracle shows that such an understanding is inadequate and that those traditional titles are to be understood in terms of Jesus' power to give life to men. It is the same here "...that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that, through this faith, you may have life in his name".

Another instance where the title 'Christ' is used as of deeper significance is Jn 4:25-26 where Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah but not exactly as proposed by the Samaritan woman. He is a Messiah who bears the divine name 'I AM'. The fact that such a formula of identification in John has a revelatory meaning is seen from Jn 18:5 where the soldiers who hear it fall to the ground, which gives the impression of a form of theophany which leaves men prostrate in fear before God⁹.

After the confession of Jesus by Thomas as 'Lord' and 'God' (20:28) which reflects the Christian responses to the presence of the risen Jesus through the Spirit, the Evangelist can scarcely have stated in 20:31 that he wrote his Gospel to bring about faith in Jesus simply as the Davidic Messiah. Therefore the major thrust of the statement in 20:31 reflects

the evangelist's desire to deepen the faith of those who were already christian so that they would appreciate Jesus' unique relation to the Father. The meaning of these titles is to be evaluated in the light of the fact that the evangelist relates the content of the Gospel to signs performed in the presence of the disciples¹⁰.

Christ the Son of God

John seems to interchange the titles 'Christ' and 'Son of God' for Jesus. This is clear from a structural consideration of 1 Jn 5:1-5, where he speaks of faith in Christ as the criterion of the divine sonship of man. The literary structure of the passage is as follows:

- 5: 1. A *Everyone who believes that Jesus is **Christ***
 B *is born of God*
 C *Everyone who loves **Him** who begot*
 D *Loves also the one born of Him*
2. D' *In this we know we love the children of God*
 C' *When we love God and keep commandments*
3. For this is the *love* of God... keep commandments
4. B' *Everyone who is born of God... victorious over the world*
5. A' *This is the victory... our faith... victorious... He who believes that Jesus is the **Son of God**.*

Note the literary parallels which are put in italic type and which show the structure of the section. In this structure vv. 1 and 5 are parallels forming an inclusion to the passage. These verses speak of faith with its content in exactly the same terms except for the titles. Therefore this parallelism shows that the titles 'Christ' and 'Son of God' which express the content are also interchangeable in John. The interchanging of these titles modifies both the concept of divine Sonship and that of Messianism in the Johannine Jesus. For John Jesus is 'Son of God' not because he is Christ as in the ordinary Jewish understanding of the term, but he is 'Christ' because he is the 'Son of God'.¹¹ The messianic character of Jesus as 'Christ' is singular, because it seems to define his being itself. Jesus' 'mission' is somehow confused with his 'being' itself. He lives not 'for' his mission, as the prophets do, but 'of' his mission¹². His mission is his coming itself.¹³

Jesus' Person and Function

Another synthesis or combination that John has made in his christological vision is the synthesis between the person and function of Jesus. The important question is "To what degree shall the

Christological assertions in John be taken as 'functional as opposed to 'personal'?' It is difficult to categorize them into one or the other, since the person and function of Jesus in John are so intimately related. It is Jesus' 'function' that reveals his 'person'.

Jesus' Messiahship: Expression of his Sonship

Actually the Johannine formula of self-witness of Jesus is "I came" or "I have come"¹⁴. The basis of the Messianic claim of Jesus is that he does not come from himself¹⁵, but from God the Father¹⁶. In the witness of John the Baptist the Messiah is "he who comes from above" (3:31). Even for the Jews the Messiah is to be recognised on the basis of his origin: "We know where this man comes from; and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from" (7:27). Thus the divine origin or sonship becomes the basis of his Messiahship, and his Messiahship becomes the expression of his Sonship.

Jesus: Son of God by nature

As the meaning of the title 'Christ' is modified in John, so also the meaning of the title 'Son of God' is modified. It certainly expresses the idea of the divine sonship of Jesus. Jesus' divine sonship seems to get an extraordinary emphasis in the writings of John. The abundant use of the word 'Father' for God¹⁷ is in itself a distinctive mark of the importance of this theme in John. The fact that the expression 'Our Father' does not occur in John, and 'Your Father' occurs only once, and that after the resurrection of Christ (20:17), marks the singular relation between the Father and the Son, as developed by John.

Different statements regarding Jesus point to the divine nature expressed by the term 'Son of God'. His pre-existence is asserted in so many words. He is before Abraham was (8:58). He goes back to heaven where he was and from where he descended (6:7, 38, 62). He was glorified before the world existed (17:5). God loved him before the creation of the world (17:24). He was with God before the existence of anything else (1:1-2). His equality with the Father in knowledge¹⁸ (Jn 16:15; 17:10), the mutual communication of the divine nature and attributes¹⁹ are all excellent proofs of his divinity that is expressed in the term 'Son of God'. Therefore though on the lips of others it could be simply a synonym for the Messiah, for Jesus and for the Evangelist, it certainly meant that Jesus is Son of God by nature.

The Revelatory nature of Jesus' divine Sonship

But it is interesting to note that John makes use of the title 'Son of

God' almost exclusively in contexts expressing Jesus' mission among men, and never in contexts expressing solely the relation existing between God and Jesus. This seems to point to the special revelatory nature characterizing the divine sonship of Jesus by John.²⁰

This is illustrated in 10:22-39 where against the background of the Feast of Dedication Jesus presents himself as the Son of God in his quality of being consecrated and sent into the world (Jn. 10:36). In response to the charge of the Jews that he is making himself God, Jesus answers with reasoning drawn from the O.T. He cites a line from Ps 82:9 "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'". The psalm was understood of judges who were given the title 'gods' because of the quasi divine function.²¹ In the argument of Jesus, the reason why the Judges could be called 'gods' was because they were vehicles of the word of God (Jn. 10:35). On that premise Jesus deserves so much the more to be called God. He is the one whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world and thus a unique vehicle of the Word of God. He is the Word of God itself. Therefore Jesus here seems to identify himself as the Son of God because he is the Word of God, namely, in his function of revealing the Father.

Jesus: the Son and Word of God

This typically Johannine idea is very well brought out in the Prologue where Jesus is presented as the "Word" (1:1-2) parallel to being the 'Only begotten Son of the Father' (1:18). A concentric structure of the Prologue is admitted by many.²² In this structure vv. 1-2 and 18 being parallels form an inclusion to the Prologue²³.

In v. 18 Jesus is contemplated in his relation to the Father and this relation is expressed in terms of 'the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father'²⁴. The particle 'in' (*eis*) has a dynamic sense in John, implying a movement towards something or someone.²⁵ So it has to be understood not psychologically but theologically referring to the dynamic relation existing between the Father and the Son. 'Bosom' is symbolic of the generation and combined with the name 'Father' for God, it seems to indicate the vital, father-son relationship that exists between God and Jesus arising from generation. Jesus is presented here as the Son who stands in a constant orientation to the source of his life - the Father.²⁶

It is this constant relationship with the Father that makes the Son the unique revealer of the Father: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made (Him) known" (v.

18). The Greek word *exegeomai* (to make known) is used absolutely without any complement. So the object of revelation is the very life shared by the Father and the Son, by virtue of their relationship as expressed above.

This is what makes Jesus the "Word of God" as presented in 1:1-2 which is parallel to 1:18. The phrase "the Word was with God" refers to Jesus as Son - a person clearly distinct from the Father²⁷ - and to the constant orientation of the Son to the source of his Life, the Father, which enables him to play his unique role as Revealer of God. So in presenting Jesus as the Word of God, it is not the Trinitarian relationship that is envisaged by John, but the unique revelatory nature of Jesus. He who was in the beginning with God is just the same one whose story the whole Gospel tells, whose life in the flesh is the centre of the history of divine salvific revelation.

Jesus' Divinity and Humanity

Another synthesis that has taken place in the Johannine vision of Jesus is the synthesis between Jesus' divinity and humanity. John states clearly that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). If the divine Logos has become fully human, how is it that his divine glory is still visible? The divine glory is hidden in the human fleshy existence. In order to see the 'glory' or divinity, one must concentrate on the 'flesh' or humanity, without becoming at the same time, a victim to appearance. This will be possible only through faith. Only when we succeed to grasp the Johannine christological synthesis of the flesh and glory we will be able to see the real Jesus of the Fourth Gospel.

The Word made Flesh

The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, thus, seems to be moving on a double plane: divine and human, as though he were living in two worlds. The dualism is expressed in substance in the short phrase of the Prologue: "The Word was made flesh" (1:14). He is the Word and he remains such. But he became flesh in time, a true man of flesh and blood.

There is a tendency to picture the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel as an abstraction, as though he were not a real man. This is based on a very onesided interpretation of certain data in the fourth Gospel. Actually the picture which St. John draws of Jesus is in some sense more appealing and more human than that of the Synoptics. How natural

and human are such scenes as that of Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman, while "wearied as he was from the journey, he was sitting at the well" (4:6). Likewise the scene at the resurrection of Lazarus brings out the intense emotion of Jesus who bursts into tears as he approaches the grave of his beloved friend: "See, how he loved him" (11:33-38). John alone has preserved the tragic tableau of 'Behold the Man' (19:5) and the pitiful cry of the crucified 'I thirst' (19:28). The scenes centered on expressions like 'Do you love me' (21:15f); 'Mary-Rabboni' (20:14f) are all evidence of the beautiful human picture of Jesus.²⁸

Yet this man is the Logos, the Son of God, whose divinity pervades his humanity. John sees Christ as a unity. He sees the human as permeated and transfigured by the divine, as a revelation of God. The glory of God shines through him.

The preoccupation of the evangelist is to show Jesus as Son of God and to explain this divine sonship through the union between the Word and humanity. He is not preoccupied with the origin of the humanity of Jesus or of the manner of union of this humanity to the Word. The fact that John speaks of the divine sonship of Jesus as based on the fact that he comes from God the Father by virtue of a generation, seems to confirm this special characteristic of the sonship of Christ.

Jesus the Only Begotten Son

The use of the word *monogenes* (the only begotten) for Jesus is indicative of this. The fact that this word is joined to the word *hyos* (son) (cf. 3:16-18; 1 Jn 4:9) or is put in relation to the word *Pater* (father) for God (cf. 1:14-18) shows that it is directly connected with the notion of sonship. It shows also that the emphasis in the divine sonship of Jesus is in his dependence of origin on the Father.

Jesus' generation: eternal and temporal

It is this idea of the divine generation of Jesus that seems to be implied in the two texts, namely in Jn 1:13 "who is born, not of blood... but of God"²⁹ and in 1 Jn 5:18 "... he who was born of God keeps him..." The fact that in both these contexts the aorist tense is used shows that the divine begetting of Jesus is conceived by John with special reference to the moment of Incarnation. Thus John seems to combine both the eternal and temporal generations. The 'only begotten' does not refer only to the temporal generation in the sense that Jesus became the 'only begotten' through Incarnation, because in Jn 3:16

and 1 Jn 4:9 God sends the one who was already 'the Only Begotten'. It does not either refer only to the eternal generation, because the term 'only begotten' is used in John only after the affirmation of the Incarnation and in strict connection with it. Note the phrase that accompanies the title "the only begotten" in Jn 1:14 'full of grace and truth' which could be said only of Jesus the Incarnate Word³⁰.

This twofold generation of Jesus envisaged by John is expressed by the Ecclesiastical Writers of the 2nd century using different terms for Jesus, such as, 'carnal and spiritual', 'begotten and not made', 'God made in flesh', 'from Mary and from God' etc.³¹ It is this combined generation of Jesus, both eternal and temporal, that becomes the object of faith for the believers and the source and prototype for their divine sonship and birth: "To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in the name of him, who is born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh... but of God" (1:12-13).

Incarnation: sign of the eternal generation

The temporal generation, i.e. the Incarnation is the sign of Jesus' eternal generation. In 1:13, taking the singular reading, what John wants to express is the divine generation of Jesus. He wants to explain it through the temporal generation or Incarnation. Though the wonderful manner of the temporal generation (virgin birth) in itself is not of great interest to John, the extraordinary nature of Incarnation seems to be emphasized, because as a sign of the divine generation it has its importance. It is worth noting that in excluding the elements of ordinary human birth in 1:13, John does not exclude the will of the woman,³² which had an essential role in Incarnation.³³ Hence the Incarnation (virginal birth) is the sign and expression of the divine generation of Jesus.

Jesus' earthly ministry:

Sign of his Divine Sonship and Mission

As the temporal generation of Jesus is the sign and continuation or extension of his eternal generation, so the words, deeds and life-style of Jesus become the signs and extension of his being and mission as the Son of God and therefore as the unique revealer of God. That is why John could say with the early Church: The Word became flesh: he came to dwell among us and we saw his glory, glory as of the Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14).

Though it is only in the Prologue, that 'logos' terminology is used,

the theme of the whole Gospel is the inter-relation of the two levels of reality - logos, spirit, the eternal glory of the divine, on the one hand, and flesh, this world of space-time, on the other. They coincide in Jesus: the Word becomes flesh and the glory of the invisible God is seen and heard and handled. Both the spirit and the flesh are of equal importance and must be taken with equal seriousness. Flesh without Spirit is of no significance (3:6; 6:63), but the flesh is indispensable as the locus of the revelation. The very purpose of the Gospel is to show this coinciding and co-inhering in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (20:31)³⁴.

Except for this truth, nothing matters. John is content to hold them together to allow one to shine through the other, to let the flesh be 'diaphanous' of the spirit (to use Teilhard de Chardin's word), so that the glory is visible in and through it. About the truth of this, John cares intensely. Whether in the process verisimilitude suffers he cares little. For, the flesh that is diaphanous does not look like flesh: the shining of the divine through it gives a docetic appearance. Hence the feeling of many like John Knox³⁵, and Ernst Kasemann³⁶ that John does not give us a genuinely human Christ at all³⁷.

This was clearly the position held by the Gnostics who were John's contemporaries. The stress in the Johannine Epistles on Jesus come in the flesh³⁸ must be seen as a reaction to the docetic impression this teaching evidently provoked. But the very fact that the reaction was so vehement suggests that this is a misinterpretation of his intention. For John it is indeed very 'antichrist' (1 Jn 2:18, 22-23; 4:2-3).

Glory of the Word in and through the Flesh

John is insistent, with equal emphasis, on the Word and the flesh and his over-all preoccupation is to show how the 'glory' of the Word, the only Son, is seen in and through the 'flesh'. Every word he speaks and every deed he does is an expression of his 'glory'. They are all 'signs' of the reality which shines through him. The Gospel of John is the record of these 'signs' which Jesus did in the presence of his disciples (20:30-31). Here we agree with Bultmann that the word 'signs' here refers to the whole content of the Gospel³⁹.

The interpretations that restrict this word 'signs' to either the miracles of Jesus⁴⁰ or his post-resurrection apparitions⁴¹ do not do full justice to the usage of the word here. The argument that is brought in favour of such interpretations is that John does not call 'sign' anything that is not miraculous or at least extraordinary. But it is quite evident that John

distrusts the marvelous element in the miracles themselves. He shows no favour towards the combination "signs and wonders": "Unless you people can see signs and wonders, you never believe" (v.48). Therefore it is the manifestation of the salvific revelation or glory that urges man to a response that gives the character of sign to Jesus' words and deeds. All his words and deeds were somehow challenging, calling for a response to Christ, and hence could be called 'signs'.

It is these 'signs' in the 'flesh' which point to the 'glory' of the 'Word' who is Christ, the Son of God and offer a challenge for response, that form the content of John's Gospel.

Conclusion

Jesus of history should never be seen in isolation from Christ of faith. Jesus of the Gospels is the real and historical Jesus, who lived, died, rose from the dead, and today lives and is experienced by the apostles and the believing communities. The Gospels present this Jesus in his various aspects. None of the Gospels nor all the Gospels together present the real Jesus in his totality. Nevertheless, they present the real and historical Jesus under one or another aspect.

The fourth Gospel presents the real historical Jesus with a threefold synthesis: between Jesus of Nazareth and Christ of faith, between the Person and Function of Jesus, and between the Glory (divinity) and Flesh (humanity) of Jesus. The key to understand the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is to enter into this threefold Johannine synthesis and the consequent Christological vision. A better understanding of this Johannine Christological vision will bring us to a better understanding of the real and historical Jesus.

St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary
Kottayam - 686 010

Mathew Vellanickal

Footnotes

1. T. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, T. T. Clark, 1991.
2. Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel", *TNTS*, London, 1962, 94-106; A.M. Hunter, "Recent Trends in Johannine Studies", *ET* 71 (1959-60), 164-67.
3. Cf. W.F. All bright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of John" in *BNTE*, Cambridge 1956, 153-171; R.E. Brown, "The Problem of Historicity in John", *CBQ* 24 (1962), 1-14.

4. For a classical exposition of this diversity in unity cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 2nd Edition, SCM Press 1990.
5. Cf. F. Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John*, London 1967.
6. So Vaticanus, Sinaiticus and probably p.66; also the critical editions of Westcott, Bover, Nestle, Merk, Aland Synopsis.
7. Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI*, 1056.
8. Cf. H. Riesenfeld, "Zu den johanneis hina-Sätzen," *ST* 19 (1965), 213-220.
9. For the usage of 'I AM' in the Fourth Gospel cf. M. Vellanickal, "I AM" in the Fourth Gospel." *Bib. Bh.* 19 (1993) 47-58.
10. Cf. W.H.G. Thomas, "The purpose of the Fourth Gospel". *BS* 125 (1968)
11. Cf. L. Venard, "Jean", *DTC* VIII, 1, Col. 568
12. Cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, (trans by G.R.B. Murray), Oxford, 1971, 153f.
13. Cf. D. Mollat. "La Divinité du Christ d'après Saint Jean", *Lum Vie* 9 (1953), 116.
14. Cf. 8:42; 16:27-28; 17:8; 18:37.
15. Cf. 7:28; 8:42
16. Cf. 8:42; 16:27, 28.
17. It occurs in the Gospel 115 times; in the 1st Epistle 16 times and in Revelation 5 times.
18. Cf. 2:24; 5:18; 6:65; 12:33; 16:29.
19. Cf. 10:30; 14:10-12; 17:22-23.
20. For the revelatory nature of the term 'Father' for God in John, cf. G. Schrenk, art. "pater", *TDNT* V, 997-999.
21. Cf. Dt 1:17..." judgement belongs to God"
22. Cf. M.E. Boismard, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean*, Paris 1953, 107; P. Lamarche, "Le Prologue de Jean", *RSR* 52 (1964), 529-532.
23. For a structural analysis and illustration of the parallelisms in the Prologue. cf. M. Vellanickal, "Jesus as the Word in the New Testament", *Jeevadhara I* (1971), 154-155.
24. About the textual problem in this connection cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, 17.
25. Cf. I de la Potterie, "L'emploi dynamique de 'eis' dans S. Jean et ses incidences théologiques," *Biblica* 43 (1962) 366-387.
26. Cf. Jn 5:57 "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father..."
27. Note the definite article before 'Theon', in Greek which would translate it literally "the God".
28. Cf. W. Grossouw, *Revelation and Redemption*, (trans by M.W. Schoenberg) London, 1965, 60-61; J.F.O Grady, "The Human Jesus in the Fourth Gospel", *BThB* 14 (1984), 63-66.
29. Here we take the singular reading which applies the birth to Christ and not to the Christians. For arguments in favour of the singular reading, cf., J. Galot, *Etre né de Dieu. Jean 1:13*, Rome, 1969; M. Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings*, *Anal. Bibl.* 72, Rome, 1977, 112-132.
30. Cf. M. J. Lagrange, *Le Quatrième Evangile*, Paris, 1925, 232.
31. Cf. Ignature of Antioch, *Ad Eph* 7, 2 in PG5, 649
32. The greek word used there is 'aner' which refers to the male, and not 'anthropos' which refers to both male and female.
33. Cf. J. Galot, op. cit., 118-122.
34. Cf. J.A.T. Robinson "Use of the Fourth Gospel for christology", in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, Cambridge, 1973, 65.
35. *The humanity and the divinity of Christ*, Cambridge, 1967, 62.
36. *The Testament of Jesus*, London, 1968, 26-74,
37. For a reply to Kasemann's position see G. Bornkamm, "Zur Interpretation des Johannes - Evangeliums", in 'Geschichte und Glaube', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*,

Vol. III, Munich, 1968, 104-21; cf. also, S.S. Smalley, "Diversity and development in John", *NTS* 16 (1970-71), 278-81.

38. Cf. 1 Jn 1:1; 4:2; 2 Jn 7.

39. Cf. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 697-699.

40. Cf. K.H. Rengstorf, "Semeion", *TWNT* VII, 253-254.

41. Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* XIII-XXI, 1058-1059.

JESUS TODAY

Steadfastness of love and life

Jesus lived nearly two thousand years ago in a region of west Asia and was executed for things he said and did which his killers deemed dangerous to their interests. But he was raised to new and full and lasting life by God the Father. His resurrection was amply testified by the early Christian believers. He is with us - the humankind, guiding and moulding our history. It is this experience of the Crucified and Risen Jesus that Paul sums up in a terse and beautiful confession: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live and yet it is no longer I but Christ lives in me".

1. Rootedness

Jesus is, was, a historical person. On this point there is consensus among scholars as there is among believers. Jesus lived nearly twenty centuries ago in a region of west Asia, in a colony of the roman empire. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, a roman governor of the colony (C.E. 26-36), was crucified, died and was buried. He was executed for things he said and did which his killers, religious and political rulers, deemed dangerous to their interests and subversive of their dominance. Scholars assure us that we can know for certain the general trend of his thoughts and views, trace an outline of his itinerant ministry, draw a credible portrait of his person, map the religious contours of his spirit, and sense the courage of his convictions, the strength of his commitments, the clarity of his heart and the warmth of his relationships.

The basis and source of this knowledge and of these images lie in the cherished memory of the community which Jesus initiated, and the documents which emanated from within this community, from people acquainted with the times and places in which Jesus lived, worked and died. The oldest documentary witness goes back to some twenty years from Jesus' death. These documents surely are not journalistic reports; nor are they critical history. They are religious writings and faith-confessions, affirming the radical significance of the crucified Jesus for the history of the human race and the destiny of the universe. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the historical character of Jesus' life and death is central and primordial to the faith which the community and its documents profess.

Equally foundational and crucial is their conviction that the Crucified One is now alive, having been raised by the Father to new and full and lasting life and saving power, and that he is present and active

as much within the same history as beyond it. The Risen Jesus is no longer merely history's victim, (he never was merely that), but its leader and fashioner as well. He is with humankind, guiding and moulding our history, leading it, in ways we cannot comprehend, into the Mystery of the Father.

2. Costly Witness

Many early Christian believers, including those who authored the faith-documents ran risks for their confession; laboured long, sharing their faith in dangerous situations; and suffered and died bearing witness to the truth of their affirmations concerning Jesus and concerning the hope they had placed in Jesus and the love they bore him.

(i) Paul, for instance, asks : "Why should we endanger ourselves every hour of our lives? I swear by the pride I take in you, in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I face death everyday" (IC 15:30-31). Paul and his companions are "subjected to every kind of hardship"; the experience amounts to 'carrying with them in their body the death of Jesus', and to 'continually being handed over to death for the sake of Jesus'. But they are never distressed; they do not despair. For they believe that the Father has raised Jesus from the dead, and they realize that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us up with Jesus in our turn" (2C 4:7-15). Paul recalls his efforts to be faithful and to persevere in times of hardships, when they were flogged or sent to prison, laboring, sleepless, starving (2C 6:1-10). If Paul is challenged to boast and be foolish, these are the things he would boast of: "I have been in prison more, I have been flogged more severely, many times exposed to death. Five times I have been given the thirty-nine lashes....; three times I have been beaten with sticks; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked...; continually travelling I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people...; I have been hungry and thirsty, and often altogether without food or drink; I have been cold and lacking clothing" (2C 11:23-29). "When I was in Damascus, the governor... put guards around Damascus city to catch me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and that was how I escaped from his hands" (2C 11:32-33; see also Ac 9:22-25, 29-30).

Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia, introduced Jesus to their audience through a sum-up of old testament history, and proclaimed his resurrection. "God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and it was these same companions of his who are now his witnesses before our people... God has fulfilled (the promise he made to our ancestors) by raising Jesus from the dead.... The one whom God has raised up... has not seen corruption" (Ac 13:13-37). The proclamation continued. The whole town assembled to hear Paul. The crowds were enthusiastic. But the Jews, filled with jealousy, contradicted everything Paul said.

In the end "the Jews worked on some of the devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city; they stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their territory" (Ac 13:44-51).

In Athens, a city of idol and philosophers, Paul sought to identify their 'unknown god' with the Maker of the world, the lord of heaven and earth. That Deity "is not far away from any of us", he said. That God leads all nations to "feel their way towards him and succeed in finding him. God is the Holy One who will judge the world in uprightness by a man he has appointed.... And God has publicly proved this by raising him from the dead". Paul thus presented to the Athenians Jesus and the resurrection. At the mention of the resurrection the philosophers laughed. For them Paul was a babblers and a parrot. They dismissed him politely. But a few did believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead (Ac 17:16-34).

Later, (about C.E. 58), when Paul visited the temple in Jerusalem, Jews from Asia Minor stirred up the crowd to riot and shout that Paul should be done away with. Paul was rescued by the tribune who also let him address the crowd from the top of the steps. Paul then told them briefly the story of his conversion to the cause of Jesus. In the neighborhood of Damascus Jesus of Nazareth had spoken to him and told him of a mission that was to be his (Ac 21:26-40; 22:1-29 cf 9:1-19). Paul was recalling the momentous fact that his first encounter with Jesus was with the Risen Jesus.

The next day he faced the Sanhedrin. As he began to speak he was struck on the mouth by order of the high priest. His mention of "our (Israel's) hope in the resurrection of the dead" as the issue for which he was on trial caused a split in the assembly. Again as there was threat to his life, the tribune had him hauled out and brought into the fortress. "Next night the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Courage! You have borne witness for me in Jerusalem and now you must do the same in Rome.'" (Ac 23:1-11)

The tribune, Claudius Lysias, sent Paul to Felix, the governor. Before him too Paul focused on the resurrection as the crucial issue. "...there will be a resurrection of the upright and wicked alike... It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today." (Ac 23:23-35; 24:1-21). The point really was not belief in resurrection in general, but the fact which Paul was proclaiming of the resurrection of Jesus whom the Jews had crucified. Governor Festus, successor to Felix, inclined to connive at a Jewish plot to have Paul eliminated during a transfer they suggested of the accused from Caesarea to Jerusalem. It was then that Paul appealed to Caesar (Ac 25:1-12). While awaiting his voyage to Rome, Paul was examined by King Agrippa at the request of Festus. In the course of his defence Paul asked: "Why does it seem incredible to you that God should raise the

dead?" (Ac 26:8). He then told the story of his anti-Jesus, anti-Christian activities, and of his conversion after a soul-shaking encounter with Jesus himself. And so finally Paul came to the pivotal point and announced: "But I was blessed With God's help, and so I have stood firm to this day, testifying to great and small alike... that the Christ was to suffer, and that, as the first fruit to rise from the dead, he was to proclaim a light for our people and for the gentiles". (Ac 26:21-23) Sent to Rome by Festus (c. C.E.60) Paul assembled the leading Jews of the great city and explained to them the reason for his being a prisoner in Rome. He had committed no crime, and he had no accusation against his own people. Rather, "it is on account of the hope of Israel that I wear this chain" (Ac 28:20). And arguing from the law and the prophets, Paul sought to persuade the Jews of the truth about Jesus (Ac 28: 17-25). The hope of Israel was the Messiah, and Jesus was that Messiah, crucified by men, but by God "designated Son of God by resurrection from the dead" (Ro 1:3-4).

So, then, the life and ministry of Paul as related in the Acts centres on the resurrection of Jesus. It is this fact Paul proclaims everywhere with clarity and consistency. He is ready to, and eventually does, suffer and die to bear out its saving truth. Particularly remarkable is the absence of triumphalism. Jesus is raised from the dead and glorified, death is overcome, God is victorious, a new history is born from the womb/tomb of the old. And yet the protagonists of this stupendous news never put on airs, never turn their noses up at anyone, do not swagger or shout, do not brag or bully. On the contrary, announcing the great good news only brings them suffering and humiliation and death, which however, are unable to undermine their hope, their joy, their buoyancy. That, I believe, is a sure mark of the authenticity of their witness and the truth of their message.

(ii) Peter is the other chief witness in the Acts to the resurrection of Jesus. He told a Pentecost crowd that God raised to life Jesus whom they had crucified. He interpreted Old Testament language about rescue from hades and from corruption as actually referring to Jesus, the Christ (Ac 2:22-31). Then he repeated the decisive message: "God raised this man Jesus to life and of that we (Peter and his companions, 2:14) are all witnesses". Additional witness to Jesus' resurrection is had in the outpouring of the Spirit, the impact of which event had brought the crowd together to that place before the 'upper room' in Jerusalem. "For this reason", concluded Peter, "the whole house of Israel can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified" (Ac 2:32-36).

A second occasion for public witness arose when Peter and John enabled a man, who was a cripple from birth to walk. As the astonished people began to collect Peter addressed them, indicating that it was the name of Jesus that brought back the strength of this man - Jesus whom they had handed over, disowned, accused, and killed.

Jesus however was the prince of life, and God raised him from the dead. "To that fact we are witnesses" (Ac 3:1-15).

The temple priests were annoyed at the apostles "teaching the people the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus". They had Peter and John arrested, jailed, questioned and then released with a warning that they should on no account speak or teach in Jesus' name. To their threats Peter and John replied, they would listen rather to God than to men (Ac 4:1-19)

Peter and the apostles used to meet in the temple porch. There crowds began to gather, bringing their sick to be healed by the touch or the shadow of Peter. The high priest and his men, filled with jealousy, had them arrested again and put in prison. At night an angel led them to and directed them to stand in the temple and tell the people about the new life. This they did. The Sanhedrin met to try them for disregarding orders. Peter and his friends then made known the good news that "it was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus whom you executed by hanging him on a tree... By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and saviour.... We are witnesses to this, we and the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him" (Ac 5:12-33). This proclamation infuriated the Council. They wanted to put the apostles to death. Gamaliel's intervention prevented that crime. So they had Jesus' friends flogged, warned and released (Ac 5:33-41).

The last time we hear Peter bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus is when he spoke to a gathering in the house of Cornelius, a roman centurion. To them Peter presented Jesus as God's anointed One 'who went about doing good'. "Now we are witnesses to everything he did throughout the countryside", as well as to the fact that "they killed him by hanging him on a tree... Yet on the third day God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses that God had chosen beforehand." And Peter added, "Now we are those witnesses; we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead and he has ordered us to proclaim this to his people, and to bear witness that God has appointed him to judge everyone..." (Ac 10:34-43)

One may note here that as in Paul's case, so in Peter's too, the resurrection of Jesus is affirmed and announced not in an atmosphere of triumph but in situations of tension, prohibition, jailing, flogging, and threat of death. In their experience as also in the experience of Jesus himself, dying and rising are inseparable. "And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name." (Ac 5:41)

(iii) Stephen and Luke are two other figures in the Acts testifying to the resurrection of Jesus. Stephen, a deacon, provoked the Sanhedrin to fury by telling the story of their ancestors' stubbornness, resistance to the Holy Spirit, and persecution of prophets, all of which culmi-

nated in the murder of the upright One, Jesus of Nazareth. As his judges ground their teeth at him, Stephen "gazed into heaven" and exclaimed: "I can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at the right hand of God." At this the Council Members shouted out, stopped their ears, rushed at Stephen, thrust him out of the city and stoned him. Stephen died with the invocation, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' (Ac 7:56-60). The resurrection is not mentioned but is included in the vision.

Luke is another witness. He begins his second book by recalling the closing scenes of his first work, how Jesus "had shown himself alive to (the apostles) after his passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them... While at table with them, he told them not to leave Jerusalem..." (Ac 1:3-5)

3. Bodiliness

The mention of Jesus being at table with his disciples is teasing (Ac 1:4). So too is Peter's witness to Cornelius: "we are those witnesses; we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead" (Ac 10:41). Did the Risen Jesus too eat and drink? Or was he merely present at the table where his friends were eating a meal? There are similar references in Luke and John. On Easter Sunday two despondent disciples, puzzled by women's tales about angels affirming that the crucified Jesus was alive, were walking away from Jerusalem and going towards Emmaus when Jesus joined them incognito. Towards the end of their journey they pressed Jesus to be their guest that evening. Jesus obliged. "Now while he was with them at table, he took bread... broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; but he had vanished from their sight" (Lk 24:28-31). Did the recognizing and the vanishing occur while they were eating or before they began the meal? Did Jesus too eat a piece of bread himself?

And in John: the Risen Jesus reveals himself to his disciples one morning by the sea of Tiberias. The disciples, seven of them, had been toiling all night but with no catch. When Jesus appeared and they came ashore "they saw there was some bread there and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it.... Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast'.... Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish" (Jn 21:1-13). Did Jesus also eat with them? Or did he stand/sit by watching his hungry friends enjoy a breakfast of bread and fish? It is only Luke and John that make such provocative suggestions. Luke in fact goes farther: when the Emmaus men returned to Jerusalem and the disciples were together, certain that Jesus 'had indeed risen and appeared to Simon', Jesus himself stood among them, wishing them peace. But they were in a state of alarm and fright, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. To calm their fears and lay their doubts to rest, Jesus showed them his hands and feet. "It is I

myself. Touch me and see for yourselves. A ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have ." As they were still dumbfounded and incredulous for joy, Jesus said to them: 'Have you anything to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. "(Lk 24:36-43)

Did the risen Jesus need food? Could his glorified body eat food (even if it did not need it) and digest it? How about the glorification and transformation by which the body transcends biological needs and processes? How does Luke's presentation tally with Paul's view that the risen body is a 'spiritual body' ? (IC 15:35-53), and with Paul's position that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom and that food and stomach will eventually be set aside (IC 6:13). Gerald O'collins (1988:39-52) critically examines the position of various scholars and concludes that Luke is using the fish-eating motif as a means for expressing three things:

(a) the bodily reality of the risen Lord against all docetic and spiritualizing tendencies within the Christian community and without. This is an 'apologetic thrust' concerning the living Jesus himself. (b) There is also an 'apostolic thrust' concerning the qualification of the apostles as witnesses. These men have eaten and drunk in the company of the Risen Jesus; they are credit worthy as witnesses. (c) there is a 'sacramental thrust', indicating the 'ongoing liturgical presence of the Lord' in the eucharistic life of the community. It is to convey these points that Luke employs the fish-eating motif. But "he does not want his readers to imagine that the risen Lord quite literally consumed and digested some fish before the astonished eyes of his disciples" (O'Collins 1988: 39-52). An excessive realism, a fundamentalist reading of all the details in the Easter narratives as facts, over-interpretation and over-belief must be avoided. In Luke 24 and John 20-21 Jesus walks a road, eats, shows gaping wounds in his side, invites touching. A literal interpretation of these runs the risk of reducing the resurrection to resuscitation of a corpse and return to earthly existence, as in the case, for instance of Lazarus of bethany or the youth of Naim who revived only to live like everybody else and die again. The resurrection is different; it is a wholly new way of bodily existence in the Holy Spirit, transformed and liberated from all forces of death.

While all this is true, may we not still ask where exactly lies the difficulty in accepting Luke's story of fish-eating as it stands? Difficulties against a risen Jesus' eating and digesting food will, as O' Collins admits, apply as well to Jesus' walking, talking, breathing, having and offering wounded hands to be touched. All the same it is good to pause and ask ourselves if we have given enough thought to what the relation might be between the risen body and this earth, this cosmos. We need to explore this further in the context of the challenge of Romans 8:18-25 concerning the liberation from corruption and travail

of the whole of creation and its entry into the same glorious freedom as the children of God enter. Theology needs to probe deeper the implications of Ephesians 1:10, God's mysterious plan to re-integrate the whole body of creation, everything in heaven and on earth, as a single organism of which Christ will be the head. Is not God renewing everything, and fashioning the new heaven and the new earth? Does not the body of the Risen Jesus, as the glorified and liberated part of the earth, have repercussions on the rest of the earth and exert on all its particles and processes a liberating lure and a whole-making magnetism? Is not creation something that God says to us in his Word and that seeks to return to God in the Word Incarnate, Crucified and Raised, sharing thus in the movement of Jesus who came from the Father into the Father's beloved world and returns to the Father bearing the world upon his heart? (Jn 16:28; 3:16-17). Is not creation, reconciled in the outpoured life of the Son, interior now to the Godwardness (Jn. 1:1, *pros ton Theon*) which is essential and constitutive of the Son? Is not all creation in the process of being drawn into the realm of the Spirit and into the reality of the body of the Risen Jesus? Could not the eating of fish (and bread) by the Risen Jesus be a small but significant symbolic manifestation of this ongoing saving action of God in his beloved Son? Real eating would not only disclose the Risen Jesus' real bodiliness and symbolize his presence, but beautifully express his solidarity and community with his disciples and with us and with the earth and all creation.

This emphasis on the real physical bodiliness of the Risen Lord does not contradict what Paul says about the 'spiritual' nature of the risen body. Spiritual here does not mean immaterial; it means belonging in the realm of the Holy Spirit, open and obedient to Her, guided, liberated and transformed by Her. In that sense one may speak of a radical spirituality of matter and of all creation (cf Gn 1:2; Ps 104:30). But the doctrine of Jesus' bodily resurrection does not stand alone. It is, as Francis Watson points out, "of a piece with the doctrines of creation and incarnation (and, one might add, of the sacraments); the culmination of the biblical narrative of creation, fall and redemption is in fundamental conformity to the beginning... Theologically the significance of this obstinately empirical element lies in what might be called the materiality of divine action: its consistent orientation towards the material reality out of which human beings along with other creatures are constituted." Watson proceeds to explain how "the basic paradigm of this materiality is obviously the act of creation itself where the divine creator is not too spiritual and transcendent to sully his hands with matter..... He shapes and moulds it and pronounces the results to be very good... In the fullness of time the Word became Flesh, and this enfleshment is not... a mere interlude to be followed by a return to the security of a transcendental in- human spirituality" (Watson: 106).

The bodily resurrection of Jesus reveals not only something about God but something about us. It discloses an anthropology, the final truth about human beings. The human is essentially a bodily being, not a spirit fallen into matter by accident or through sin. The human has an essential material component, destined in the wholeness of the human person, to enter into union with God, into the glory of God. All matter as our and Christ's potential body, extended body, has this high destiny. In the body of the Risen Jesus the material universe has already arrived at its destination, and the thrill of it pulses in every particle of the cosmos. Hence the sacredness of the body, of the earth, of matter and all its mysterious processes. Jesus' bodily resurrection, then, displays the content of salvation.

4. The Empty Tomb: history and mystery

The empty tomb narrative, found in all the Gospels serves to emphasize the same truth of Jesus' bodily resurrection as does the fish-eating motif. These accounts show the resurrection of Jesus both as "an empirical occurrence within space and time and a transcendent divine act". As a personal act of God, the event gives us a new understanding of the being of God; as the culmination of the story of Jesus, it aims at universal restoration and renewal of 'divine-human communion and community' (Watson: 96-97).

But all the four empty tomb stories are fragmentary and divergent. Does not that fact undermine their testimony, and compel us to treat them as mythological and symbolic, and go searching for some hidden meaning? The stories indeed are fragmentary but quite appropriate for the kind of event that the resurrection is, and so they mean exactly what they say (Watson: 97-100). The resurrection event itself is not mentioned, and there are no eye witnesses to it. For it cannot be described and there can be no eye witnesses. It is a divine act comparable only to the act of creation from nothing. It is as 'unobservable and shrouded in mystery' as creation is, and like creation it can only be presented indirectly. Watson calls attention to the fact that Mark 16 refuses to narrate the event itself, and declines to let the women see it though they arrive early, and denies them even a distant glimpse of their risen Rabbi. Mark only permits the women to see a young man and receive a message from him. So well is the mystery guarded. Mark 14:28 refers to the resurrection as a future event; and Mark 16:6 refers to it as a past event; its present is too sacred for human sight and speech.

"The narrative refuses to subject the event to the order and comprehensibility of narrative form, but speaks only of that which lies at the margin of the event: an empty tomb, a communication at second-hand. The refusal comes... from the narrator's reticence in the face of the mystery of the divine act." (Watson: 101) Watson concludes that the "the fragmentary nature of this particular narrative is.... not

an accident, but is integral to its meaning.... (it is) essential to the peculiar nature of its testimony". For "the reader's eye must be diverted from trying to penetrate too directly into the heart of the mystery, which must therefore always be located in the future or in the past and never in the narrative's present" (Watson: 101).

Those therefore who interpret the resurrection of Jesus in terms of the disciples' experience of renewal, or of the rise of faith in their hearts, or of other subjective phenomena are reducing the event to a general category of 'religious experience' which is accessible to critical reason. But then they are dealing with "a fundamentally different event to the one that lies just beyond the bounds of the Markan narrative. In Mark, even a second-hand report of the event is.... destabilizing". The natural, nay, the appropriate reaction to it is "a terrified distancing of oneself from it" (Watson: 101). "And the women came out and ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (Mk 16:8)

There is a fourfold resurrection tradition. The narratives differ in details. Yet all of them are agreed "in their refusal to dispel the mystery by penetrating to its heart" (Watson: 103). It is the mystery of the divine act of raising Jesus from the dead that generates our faith and sustains it. That act is the primary theme of the story. The mystery character of the event leaves our faith vulnerable, its only security being his promised presence (Mt 28:20). Faith does not rest on 'historical evidence', but on the unseen, mysterious act in which God raised Jesus from the dead. Watson insists that "it is wrong to characterize the raising of Jesus as an exceptionally well-attested historical event". He decries the "myopic positivism that cannot see beyond the marshalling of so-called 'historical evidence' for or against the actuality of the raising of Jesus" (Watson: 105-107). Were some irrefutable objective historical evidence necessary, Jesus should have appeared, as Celsus argued in the 2nd century C.E., to those who had condemned him: Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate, and the crowd that cried for his blood. But could such evidence ever have engendered saving faith?

We must be clear at the same time that faith is not to be cut off from its historical origins. We affirm that our faith commits itself "in the light of certain realities which took place prior to our commitment and independently of it." A historical world-view 'belongs to the Jewish-Christian faith from the beginning' (O'Collins 1978: 12). But as O'Collins rightly observes, "historical truth is not the only kind of truth... Everything that is historical is real, but not everything that is real is historical" (ibid.: 15). There is not only history but poetry and mystery as well.

The resurrection is not an objective event to be dispassionately

picked up and critically examined by neutral agents; nor is it subjective and fictional. It is an interpersonal, relational event, analogous to friendship, a Deed-Word which God freely addresses to our world and us, challenging and moving us to an appropriate response in freedom. The resurrection is a gift God's love offers to humankind. Its truth as gift is realized only in loving, grateful reception of it. It belongs in the realm of inter-personal, not objective, history, the history of God's love calling for a human response. Along with the cross of Jesus, the resurrection is the central event of the story of God's love. The story is not heard except in loving openness, except with the heart. And the event itself is not truly perceived and a live encounter does not happen except in a response of faith relationship.

Mark's Gospel is, in Frances Young's view, a well-written drama. "Though its language is the crude rough Greek of Palestinian, (it) is written with conscious literary art. The central figure of the drama foresees the destiny he has to face, struggle with it in Gethsemane and then is progressively isolated...." (Young: 146) Now "the drama effects an exposure of the truth. It becomes a universal narrative, a story told by an inspired poet, not a mere chronicler or historian." Young cites Aristotle for whom "poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars" (Young: 147).

The story of Jesus is history which is poetry and drama. A tragedy in which freedom becomes free and realises itself as love in a struggle within the fatal grip of destiny; a tragedy in which death and life are inseparable in the person of Jesus no less than in his disciples, just as in the women of the resurrection fear and silence (Mk) or fear and joy (Mt) linger together; a tragedy the truth of which will touch us to *katharsis* in the measure in which we are open to its movement and participate in the action.

5. Participation

Jesus then is not only a historical reality and a remembered past; he is a present grace. Since he rose from the dead and is alive, we encounter him in his transformed human bodily wholeness within our faith commitment and our dedication to his cause and his people today. Early Christians realized Jesus as Immanuel, God-is-with-us, as sacrament of God's gracious presence in our midst, on our earth (Mt. 1:23). It was contact with the Risen Lord that enabled them to recognize in him the fulfilment of an ancient prophetic symbol (Isa. 7:19). The Risen Immanuel is God's word of comfort to the weak, the threatened and the distressed. It says: 'Do not be frightened or demoralised by the anger of the powerful who move to attack and destroy you. This will not happen.' The unfailing sign given to reassure us is the Risen Immanuel.

In the experience of the Risen Jesus other Christians sensed the seed of the New Age of creation's completion. They knew in their

hearts that here, in the Risen Jesus, God lives among human beings, making his home among them. They will be his people and he will be their God, God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, no more mourning, sadness or pain. The world of the past has gone (Rev. 21: 3-4; cf Gn 17:18; Lv. 26:11-12; Jr. 31:33; Ezk 37:27). Note that all these are resurrection themes. In Jesus death has been overcome, and Jesus is himself the new earth, its promise, seed and sign.

Yet other Christians experienced the Risen Jesus as spanning the expanse of human history, redeeming and liberating it, and transforming it with beauty and meaning. They rejoiced that "Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever"; they rejoiced that his love is everlasting, and "his power to save those who came to God through him is absolute since he lives for ever..." (Hbr. 3:8; 7:25). This letter to the Hebrews closes with a prayer to the God of peace "who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus" (13:20), even as it began by recalling his exaltation to the right hand of God on high (Hbr. 1:3-4).

Luke's community understands the Risen Lord as present and speaking when scriptures are read and explained in the Christian liturgy. They experience Jesus as kindling faith and making hearts burn with the desire to meet him intimately in the eucharist. Lk. 24:13-32 reflects the dynamic structure of worship, says O' Collins. It reflects every Christian's, every person's life's journey: how its honest quest is rewarded by the companionship of the Risen Lord and a final encounter with him in Word and Sacrament. In Acts 8:26-39 we have a similar journey and search by an Egyptian eunuch; it too ends in the man's finding the key to the scriptures, and meeting Jesus in baptism (O' Collins, 1978: 57-58).

On this point Paul is explicit. To be baptized is to be immersed in the death of Jesus and to be buried with him in order to 'begin living a new life', 'as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father'. The sacrament is a dying and rising with Christ, a participation in the paschal mystery, communion with the crucified and raised Jesus who died to sin and lives with God (Rom. 6:2-11). 'Even when we were dead in our sins, God loved us, brought us to life with Christ and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven' (Eph 2:4-6).

It is this mystical experience of the crucified and raised One that Paul sums up in a terse and beautiful confession: "I have been crucified with Christ, and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me." (Gal. 2:20)

Our experience of being God's children is a resurrection experience. It is made possible by God who sends into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, the Resurrection Spirit (Jn. 7:37-39; 19:33-35; 20:19-23; Rom. 8:11). It is this Spirit that cries from our depths, Abba, Father,

and educates us to pray and to live as God's children (Gal. 4:4-7); Rom. 8:26-27; Gal. 5:16-26).

That is how we become a resurrection reality, a new creation. And becoming that is all that matters' (Gal. 6:15; 5:6). "For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see" (2 C 5:17). The experience of newness, the call and the challenge of newness, is upon us on account of the resurrection of Jesus and our faith-encounter with him

6. Images

So then something that Jesus had indicated in a small but exquisite poem of his has come true. The wheat grain was willing to fall into the ground; it fell and died. But then the immense possibilities that had lain dormant within the grain got unfettered and activated. The rich promise of life enshrined in the seed was released to become an abundant harvest for the nurture of the nations (Jn 12:24). That is Jesus' own chosen image for the mystery of his dying and rising. An image available to people everywhere.

Or, to cite O'Collins: "As man has learned to set free stunning amounts of power from tiny pieces of matter, so God took the dead Jesus and liberated him to be the Risen Lord, one powerfully present to all times and places... An apparently weak lump of matter can explode with such energy! Is it too much to use this 'miracle' of nuclear physics as an image of Jesus being utterly 'weak' in death and then transfigured to such power through his resurrection?" (O' Collins 1978:76)

The stone that builders rejected, God has picked up to make it the chosen and cherished corner stone of a new world, a new age, a new humanity. "This is the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it." (Mk 12:10-11) Or God took a common seemingly worthless, charcoal-piece of a man. Under pressure of the cross and its pain, under the weight of hostility and mockery on the part of men but within the bracing love of God, the piece of coal becomes transformed into the finest and costliest of brilliant diamonds, spilling glory on all creation. Are the stars diamond dust scattered as God treads the coal-heap of the night? He who does that has made life spring from the womb of death.

Resurrection is a new birth from the womb of history into the vastness of a marvellous, infinitely beautiful and dynamic realm of the Spirit of God - a new birth analogous to our first birth which gave us an incomparably larger life and wider world, with endless possibilities of experiences, growth and creativity and sorrow, joy, community and ecstasy than we never had or could have in the little, though dear, world of mother's womb. To quote O' Collins again: "In being raised from the dead Jesus was liberated to enter into a web of relationships with the universe of men (and women) and things". O'Collins 1978:77)

In suggesting images of the resurrection we do well to learn to take a leap "from the world of inter-related organisms to the risen Christ's intense interrelationship with the entire cosmos" and with every living thing and each human person. For "in his bodiliness Jesus was freed from the ordinary limitations of space, time and matter to enjoy relations with all times and places... No risen body is an island (O'Collins 1978:77-78").

The resurrection has not removed Jesus from us to the sky, but has made him more dynamically and intimately present in the world and in our lives than when he walked in Galilee (Stanley: 417-43).

7. Promises

Jesus has indeed promised to be so present.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am with you always; Yes, to the end of time". And to the ends of the earth to which he was now sending his apostles to disciple people (Mk 28:18-20).

He said to them: "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them" (Mt. 18:19). And his name is not only Jesus but Bread of life; his name is Truth; his name is Son of Man who has nowhere to lay his head. All his concerns are his name. Wherever his concern to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to honour the dishonoured, to forgive the sinner, to reconcile the alienated, to create beauty and community is taken to heart and brings people together, the Risen Jesus is there, very present, very participant.

Jesus said "I tell you the truth: in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did it to me... In so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me" (Mt 25:31-45). Jesus is present in, and is solidary with, the hungry, the sick, the jailed, the despised and all who are broken and forgotten. He is one with them. They are He. Loving them and caring for them in concrete ways is to bind up the wounds of the Crucified and to be at the service of the Resurrection.

Jesus said: I am going now... I shall return to take you to myself so that you may be with me where I am' (J. 14:2-3, 28; cf 12:26; 17:24). He and we shall be together present to each other.

Jesus said: "I shall not leave you orphans. I shall come to you... You will see that I live, and you also will live... You will know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" (Jn. 14:18-20; 15:3-5). We shall see with the heart, and with the heart shall we taste the closeness, and the wonder of having him in us, and of being ourselves in him, and all of us in the Father.

Jesus said: "Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him, and make a home in him" (Jn 14:23). The intimacy deepens, and ripens into family relationships. We come to belong with one another: the Risen Jesus, the Father

who raised him and we who are seized by their mystery, all belong together, in peace and trust, around a common hearth.

Jesus said: "I am the true vine... remain in me as I in you... whoever remains in me and I in him, bears fruit in plenty. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please... (Jn 15:1, 3, 5, 7). Jesus is a great Vine that developed from a tiny cutting; a great tree grown from a small seed. He is present to us as a tree is present to its branches; and we, to him as are branches to the tree. The implications of this intimate mutuality and total sharing are noteworthy.

Jesus said: "Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (Jn 15:9-10). The presence is profoundly personal and free. The word acts as a corrective to a possible misreading of the vine-branch parable as pointing to some mechanical and given relationship. The reality of the mutual presence is love which is freedom's ripeness and self-realization.

Love, being so central, is dwelt upon. Jesus said: "This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends... I chose you. My command to you is love one another" (Jn 15:12-17). Love is life. Everyone who loves has passed from death to life (I Jn 3:14; cf Jn 5:24). Love is resurrection; dynamism of love transforms and whole-makes. Jesus loved and kept growing into a living flame until on Calvary he exploded to reveal the resurrection and the New Humanity. Chosen to be friends, we are drawn into the orbit of his transforming fire. The resurrection is in process.

And Jesus said: "I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you, and your joy be complete" (Jn 15:11; 16:22-24). The risen Jesus is the joy of God poured into the cup of our history and into the cup of our hearts. God is joy, *Brahman* is *Ananda*, because the Divine is Love.

That is why the paschal mystery has 'a feminine face'.

8. A Feminine Face, a feminine sequence

Women encircle the story of Jesus. The story begins with Jesus' Mother and ends with the women of the resurrection. It lies in their embrace, and is their gift to the world. Before the end came Jesus himself presents the mystery in a telling feminine imagery. Jesus said: "In all truth I tell you: you will be weeping and wailing... You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers because her time has come. But when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world. So it is with you..." (Jn 16:20-22).

So it is with Jesus. He is the woman in travail. In the pains of human life, in the birthpangs of Calvary, this Mother brings forth the new Humanity, the true Humanness, the authentic Life, and a humane

Earth. O'Collins writes: "... Jesus himself suffers birthpangs as he brings the whole human race to new life. His own image of a woman in labour whose sorrow will give way to joy when her baby is 'born into the world' is especially exemplified in Jesus himself. He is the woman whose hour has come and who must endure the anguish of birth... His Mother, Mary Magdalene and other women assist at this agonising childbirth" (O'Collins 1978:99). But now Her sorrow turns to joy for a new humanity and a new hope are born into the world.

So it is with Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is the woman in travail. She must deliver the new man again in writhing pain. The tomb represents her womb. Within it is the body which sums up the body of the universe and the self of all of us. Through Mary's agony too the Son will become the first-born from the dead' (Col. 1:18). Mary's sorrow too turns to joy (O'Collins 1978:99).

So it is with Mary Magdalene and the other women, the first discoverers of and believers in the Risen Lord. They are the women in travail. They come to the tomb to be of service. They are preplexed to see the tomb open, with no Birth to be found. They are afraid to notice strangers around. Magdalene runs to inform the men. Birthpangs. The men come and see and go away. Mary lingers weeping near the tomb. Then she hears the voice of the First Born from the dead, recognizes him, clasps his feet, receives the mission to evangelize the men, Peter, John and others and admit them into the church of the resurrection which for a while was an all-women community. And the women's sorrow turns to joy for now the true Human Being is born into the world.

There is a 'feminine face to Jesus' death and resurrection', writes O'Collins: "A feminine sequence emerges from John's text. From the image of the woman in childbirth, we move to the mother standing with other women by the cross... We come finally to the woman whose sorrow was turned into joy" (O'Collins, 1978: 95-96).

Where men disciples fail to grasp, women disciples understand and accept. Men talk a good deal, women act. Men run away, women stand by the cross. What does all this amount to? O'Collins replies: "If you think and act feminine you will seize the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection... Mark's text suggests a feminine approach to the death and resurrection of Jesus. By wordlessly being there and contemplating the events we will seize the mystery, or rather let the mystery seize us" (O'Collins 1978: 101-102).

Meanwhile Jesus is coming to our hearts and homes and histories. And his voice may be heard: "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If anyone of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side" (Rev 3:20).

Vidyajyoti, Delhi.

Samuel Rayan

References:

Barton, 1994, Stephen and Stanton, Graham. eds., *Resurrection*. (London: SPCK)

O'Collins, 1978, Gerald. *What are they Saying about the Resurrection?* (New York: Paulist Press)

O'Collins, 1988, Gerald, *Interpreting the Resurrection*. Examining the major Problems in the stories of the Resurrection. (New York: Paulist Press)

Stanley, 1968, David, "Contemplation of the Gospels, Ignatius Loyola and the Contemporary Christian"; in *Theological Studies* 29 (1968), p. 417-43

Watson, 1994, Francis. 'He is not here'. Towards a Theology of the Empty Tomb in *Resurrection* by Barton and Stanton.

Young, 1994, Frances, "The Mark of the Nails", in Barton and Stanton: *Resurrection* 1994.

- 1 The editorial board does not necessarily endorse the individual views of contributors.
- 2 Articles for publication should be sent to the respective section editors.
- 3 Books for reviews (two copies each), exchanges, queries should be addressed to the general editor.
- 4 Subscriptions are payable in advance.
- 5 Subscription starts with January / February issues.
- 6 Copies are sent by sea mail unless otherwise required. Air surcharges will be extra.
- 7 Please address your subscriptions to:

Jeevadhara

Kottayam - 686 041

Do not send it to anybody's name.

Those who send subscriptions by Cheque are requested to add also Bank Commission (Rs. 10 - 15).

SUBSCRIPTION RATE

India

Rs. 48 /- (Malayalam)

Rs. 60/- (English)

(Sea mail) (Air mail)

Foreign \$ 20 \$ 26 (Americas)

\$ 24 \$ 30 (Canada)

DM 30 DM 40 (Europe)

£ 13 £ 16 (England & Ireland)

Printed at Theocentre Press, Kottayam - 686 041
and Published at Jeevadhara Office, Kottayam - 41
by J. Constantine Manalel

JEEVADHARA

PRESENTS

A Mature Vision of Religion
a Liberation-based Social Perspective
and a Spirituality
relevant to concrete life-situations.

IT IS

an incessant search
for Truth at all costs
and ever broadens
one's horizons of thought.